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The Doctrine of Absolution.

By the same Author.

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THE OUTWARD MEANS OF GRACE, A Sermon, preached in the Church of ST. MARY, TOTNES, at the Triennial Visitation of the Right Reverend the Lord Bishop of Exeter, August 11, 1848. Printed by request. Third Edition. 1848. 8vo. 1s.

AN ENQUIRY INTO THE
DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND UPON
ABSOLUTION.



BY THE REV. WILLIAM MASKELL, M.A.

VICAR OF S. MARY CHURCH AND DOMESTIC
CHAPLAIN TO THE LORD BISHOP
OF EXETER.

LONDON
WILLIAM PICKERING
1849

The reader is requested to make the following corrections.

- p. 41. l. 1. for representing, read refuting.*
- p. 164. l. 16. for the power to forgive and to retain sins, read, the necessity of confession.*
- l. 18. for that power, read, the power of absolution.*

TO THE REVEREND THE CLERGY
OF THE
DIOCESE OF EXETER.

MY REVEREND BRETHREN,

T may be thought, and perhaps most justly, a presumptuous thing that I should inscribe this volume to you: but it is not from any idle vanity, nor because I suppose its pages to be worthy of your regard, that I venture to do so.

There are local circumstances connected with the publication of it, which I trust will serve, in some measure, as my excuse for thus addressing you.

In August last, at the visitation of the Bishop of the diocese, I preached at Totnes. My sermon contained statements upon chief doctrines of the Christian Faith, which, left to recollection only, might very easily have been mistaken or exagge-

rated. The Bishop with the concurrence of many of the clergy desired that the sermon should be printed; in order that himself and all who had heard it might have an opportunity to judge of it, after deliberation. In expressing this desire, his Lordship declared at the same time, that there were statements in the sermon, to which, as he heard them, he did not assent.

When published, the sermon caused excitement and adverse remark in several parts of the diocese. I cannot say that I was astonished at this: on the contrary, I was prepared for remark: but I was not prepared for accusation without reasons, or for complaints without argument.

In particular; twenty clergymen addressed a memorial to the Bishop, calling on his Lordship for the expression of some grave episcopal censure of the sermon. Several letters followed, which have been published, and, not troubling you with details, let me make one or two remarks.

The whole correspondence was closed without a single application from the memorialists to myself to explain or to withdraw any one statement in my sermon. Do not suppose that I think that this was, in the most remote degree, improper; far from it; my thanks are due to those who, coming forward in so formal a manner to

ask for “a grave episcopal censure,”—whatever they supposed that to be,—gave me at least credit for having carefully thought over beforehand all that I deemed it right to speak in the presence of the bishop and many clergy of the diocese assembled in Visitation. And, let me add, herein they did me justice.

Nor do I complain for one instant of the memorial itself. If I have preached unsound doctrine, let it be condemned. Only let no man publish accusations against another,—be they heavy or be they light, many or few,—accusations, I say, and not matters of dispute in controversy, unless he is prepared to go on and try to prove the truth of them.

I do not comprehend upon what principle it is, that many people, well-intentioned, are so ready to charge one another with all kinds of religious errors ; neglecting at the same time to specify a standard of appeal, and abstaining from all attempt to offer evidence confirmatory of an opposite view of Divine Truth. Accusations of teaching erroneous doctrine are not light to bear : they ought not to be lightly brought ; neither ought they to be left unsupported. Although perhaps an individual may hardly claim it, yet when one or more of the clergy come forward, conscientiously, to contradict some definite teaching, the

Church has a right to know the opposite view which, by implication, they who object require their brethren, and him also whose teaching they condemn, to accept in its place.

There is one sentence only in the letters addressed by the Plymouth clergy to the Bishop which I wish to lay before you. It is this:

“The statement [in the sermon] that the absolution pronounced at the administration of the Lord’s Supper is intended only to meet the case of venial sins, . . . we allege to be in opposition to the Form itself, in which the priest pronounces these words, *Almighty God have mercy upon you, pardon and deliver you from all your sins.*”

I quote this in order that you may decide how far the present work meets the objections of the memorialists, upon the doctrine of absolution. The sentence, as it seems to me, (coupled with the fact that no objection was made against my interpretation of the form in the office of visiting the sick) can only mean that, in their opinion, the form in the communion Service conveys remission of *all* sins. In other words; the efficacy which I restrict to a form of absolution after oral confession, is by them extended to the form, after a general confession, in the liturgy. If, on the contrary, the memorialists had denied the grace of absolution or explained it away:—if, that is,

they had declared my doctrine to be unsound because absolution is only a preaching generally of the promises of God ; or, a particular declaration of His promises to an individual ; or, again, is only exercised in the administration of the sacraments of baptism and the eucharist ;—this would have been another and an equally intelligible line of argument; but then they would not have found the errors on which it must be based treated of, except very briefly, in the following pages. You must impartially judge whether I have misrepresented the obvious meaning of their words. If I have not, then I am glad to think that I differ from them, not about the effect of absolution as a chief ordinance of the Christian Faith, but about the interpretation which we are to give to the several forms of absolution in our Common-prayer Book.

There were other clergymen, besides the memorialists from Plymouth, who complained to the Bishop of the diocese that I had preached unsound doctrine. From only one of them did I receive the courtesy of being made aware that charges so serious had been brought against me. As their letters have not been published, it probably would be thought improper for me to enter into any particulars. I would only say this much : that I have a right to ask for some justice at

their hands. My argument upon the doctrine which was especially objected against is now before them.

Some persons complained because my visitation sermon was published without an appendix of authorities ; let me ask them to consider how I was to discover what part of it, in particular, would be chiefly objected against ? There are, if I mistake not, important assertions in the sermon upon other doctrines besides absolution ; and here, upon that doctrine alone, is an attempt at a distinct treatise to begin with. Incomplete (I know well) it is : there has been but little time for me to finish it, because not a sheet was written before the first of November. I would plead this, as an excuse for so much as perhaps it may be worth ; namely, for inaccuracies of reference, or carelessness of style : but, not as an excuse for erroneous statements of doctrine, or for incorrect arguments, or for misrepresentations of the teaching of our Church. These last are not to be *excused* ; they must be explained, or retracted.

After this book, with the exception of the supplement, was sent to press, I received a copy of a printed Letter to myself, by the Rev. F. T. Hill of Ottery S. Mary. This circumstance will account for my not having particularly noticed his

publication in my “Enquiry.” But I think it will be found that most of his objections are there considered, so far as they fall within the scope of my own argument. For (let me press it upon you) this work is addressed to those who acknowledge that sacerdotal absolution is an ordinance of God, conveying grace and remission of sins ; and that it is not merely an authoritative declaration, whether general or particular, of such remission.

But I must not conceal my sense of the kind and Christian spirit in which the Letter of Mr. Hill is written. It would be a source of regret to me, if there should be a cause of offence to him by any word that I have said. And his example, by experience in my own case, has confirmed me in a resolution which I have long striven to observe ; namely “to avoid the use of harsh and unkind words towards others, and to keep within the reasonable bounds of Christian controversy.” Let me go on with this same sentence, written more than two years ago, in the preface to another work : “I have endeavoured to remember that they whose judgements are different from my own, may be far more competent than myself to argue upon many matters, on which I have nevertheless not hesitated to speak plainly my belief ; first, because it seemed not right to be silent, and,

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secondly, because I was satisfied that I was but uttering the doctrine of the Church of England, in which I am a priest."

May God of His great goodness guide us into all Truth.

I am, Rev. Brethren,

Your very faithful servant,

W. MASKELL.

S. MARY CHURCH,
Dec. 20th, 1848.



The Doctrine of Absolution.

CHAPTER I.

MY object, in the present publication, is to enquire into and ascertain so much of the doctrine of the Church of England upon Absolution, as may be gathered from, or is mixed up with, the forms of Absolution contained in the Common Prayer Book.

Absolution is a doctrine so great, that the consideration of any branch of it must involve consequences of no little importance to every Christian : an importance not to be estimated, when we have to argue points with which practice is concerned. Then the discussion can be no longer regarded by any one who is sincerely anxious to work out his salvation, as merely one among many questions debated in the schools ; but he must acknowledge, in his own conscience, that he is himself deeply and personally interested in the truth, whatever that may at last be shewn to be.

As we proceed, it will probably happen that I shall advance arguments which some will desire to dispute, and that I shall assert positions from which they will be eager to dissent. Many causes, which it is not now necessary for me to enter into in detail, will conduce to this: and let me earnestly request the reader, to weigh dispassionately all that may be said, and, before he decides against the truth or the correctness of the conclusions at which we shall finally arrive, carefully to recollect whether he is or is not influenced by previous habits of thought and prejudice; by a too great and long-established reliance upon authorities whose judgment he may not so accurately have examined, as he has hastily adopted; or, by a desire to consent to something which may look like an easier explanation of what he must own to be very difficult and obscure: easier, not in the mode by which it seeks to remove the difficulty, but in the results to which it leads, and in the claims which it makes upon the active practice of those who accept it.

Nor in this place is it out of the way for me to observe, that the easiness, so understood, of explanations of chief doctrines of the Holy Gospel, is in itself—I would not say a mark of error, but,—at least a note of warning, and an intelligible call upon us to hesitate and doubt. If our earthly pilgrimage towards heaven were over roads always plain, smooth, and pleasant; if it was quite certain that having wandered from the right path, we could regain it without labour and pain and sorrow; nay, more than this, if there were no

words in the discourses of our Divine Redeemer telling us of our taking up His Cross ; of hating one's own kindred for His sake ; of making foes of one's own household ; of losing life itself ; then we might perhaps be borne out in thus explaining all the duties which, being His disciples, we are bound to perform : but we should make His burthen so light, and His yoke so easy, that neither the one nor the other would be any longer a reality, but a shadow.

And if what has just been said be true, as undoubtedly it is, of the Christian life of those who, in purity and constant faith, have their lives-long laboured to walk worthy of their high calling, how much more must it be true in regard to others who by wilful and continued sin have stained, over and over again, their baptismal robes, and fallen from grace. Who can think that he speaks the language of the Gospel, when to such as these he proposes, and proposes only, brief and easy remedies ; and passports opening even, as it were, upon the first demand, the door of reconciliation?

It is a source of comfort to me, about to enter upon such an enquiry as I have proposed, to remember that these pages will not in any popular manner set before our people generally, arguments and proofs and decisions ; on the contrary, from the very nature of those arguments, and from numerous quotations being given in the language of the original writers, this work will chiefly be read by the clergy, whose proper office it is first to form their own judgement, and then to teach men over whom they are placed in the Lord.

I do not suppose that there is any Christian truth which, so long as it is disputed, we ought to withdraw (if I may say so) from common observation and the strife of vulgar tongues more heedfully than the doctrine of absolution. For, where there is not only no foundation already laid of learning, but also the positive existence of prejudice and of an ignorant apprehension of hateful and most false consequences, we must be prepared to hear from many to whom we speak, the open expression of profane opinions and sentiments: so profane, that the very persons by whom such sentiments are avowed, would often be the first to shrink from and to abhor them, if they had been either better taught, or more prudently dealt with.

Absolution, as commonly understood, is that Divine Ordinance or Sacrament, in which, and by means of which, men may obtain remission of sins which they have committed after Baptism.

And, here, before we go further, let me distinctly say that I do not propose to enter at all into any proof of the doctrine that sin after baptism may be remitted without the application of absolution: in other words; that absolution, as a means of grace, is not necessary to our salvation. No one, I presume, would assert that the church of England since the middle of the sixteenth century declares, as for a period before that time she did declare, that all her members shall be obliged to receive absolution. This, even if her own authoritative documents could admit or suggest doubt, has been made manifest enough by almost

innumerable writers, commonly referred to : and it would now be for me a mere waste of labour to repeat their arguments. My object is to shew, what some (at least) have too much forgotten in the eagerness of controversy ; namely, that whilst, upon the one hand, the church of England, following the example of the primitive Church and relying upon Holy Scripture, does not believe absolution to be of necessity to salvation, and to this belief I most entirely and unequivocally consent ; yet that, upon the other hand, where duly sought for and duly administered, she still holds that absolution conveys the same graces and spiritual blessings as of old, from generation to generation, up to the days of the apostles.

Nor do I intend to include any discussion about public offences, and public penance and absolution. These would open up not only a long, but an utterly distinct, class of subjects. Such an enquiry would be concerned with the mode in which the violated external discipline of the Church might be properly vindicated, how the scandal might be fitly removed, and how the offender, having been justly punished, might be restored to communion. But we have now to consider in what manner the church of England teaches us, that secret sins, known it may be only to oneself, may be remitted in the sight of God, and the sinner again placed in a state of justification.

Nor, once more, shall I argue at all whether sacerdotal absolution, as that term is used in our Church, does or does not convey the Divine grace and pardon.

I am justly warranted in taking this for granted. My debate is not with those who reject and disbelieve the grace of absolution ; with those who make light of, and explain away the awful commission of our Blessed Lord, “ Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them ; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained ; ” with those (in a word) who will not admit the doctrine of *sacramental* grace at all ; but with those who know and teach that “ Absolution is a power which the Church has ever thankfully acknowledged to have been given to her by her Divine Head, and which no particular Church can ever surrender, without cutting itself from the Catholic Church of Christ, and therein from Christ himself.”

But, on the contrary, men who, unhappily, belong to societies like many communities of foreign protestants, or, for example, the presbyterian kirk of Scotland, which have separated themselves from the Catholic Church, may, very consistently and intelligibly too, consider absolution to be nothing more than a declaration of the Infinite mercy of the Almighty towards all truly repentant sinners ; or, nothing more than a serviceable branch of the outward discipline of congregations, by which notorious offenders, who have been expelled, might be again admitted ; or, a still higher though perhaps a more confused idea, that it is nothing more than a remission of sins in the sacrament of baptism. I say this is intelligible enough, when alleged by those to whom I am now referring. Nay, if such societies claimed to have, even if they stoutly insisted

upon the necessity of, the grace of absolution in its real sense and meaning, they would only be deceiving their own selves, and talking about what they cannot, out of the Church, by possibility possess. Absolution of sin by the mouth of the ministers of God, even like the blessed sacrament of the eucharist, can be obtained only from those who have received both power and commission to bestow it. It is a fearful truth, that so many thousands and tens of thousands of baptized persons live on from the font to the grave,—I do not say without the reception of absolution, for this they do not desire or believe in, but—without more than the mere fiction and pretence of eating and drinking the Body and the Blood of our adorable Redeemer, the partaking of Which is “generally necessary to salvation.”

The method which I shall pursue will be, first to lay before the reader the opinions of those writers upon our Book of Common Prayer, who are commonly regarded as ritualists, and to whom the clergy of the English church usually refer in order either to decide doubts, or to explain difficulties. The reason why these writers have been so almost universally appealed to, as decisive, to the exclusion of earlier authorities who have investigated the like subjects, may be traced to various causes: chiefly, because the earlier books being dear as well as scarce, have not been purchased by many who, nevertheless, have perhaps spent money on less worthy objects, and who have been therefore contented to rely upon second-hand information, without

taking the pains to enquire for themselves at better sources. Or, again, because of the ignorant and long-established and, until late years, wide-spread conception of the origin of our Book of Common Prayer ; namely, that it was “written” or “compiled” at the reformation, when all things were made new ; and therefore that we need do no more than adopt some interpretation, out of the several authors since that time, which best suits our own notions about the matter in dispute. This last theory, if any fancy so visionary and untrue may be called a theory, at once and altogether deprives the Church herself, whose Book and Ritual it is, of voice and authority. In fact, loudly as people may choose to boast about the learning and acuteness of Sparrow, or Wheatley, or Comber, or Shepherd ; or to cry, “I am of this one,” and “I of that ;” yet, after all, it is a mode of talking which resolves itself into a simple assertion of each man’s individual and personal judgement.

I would wish not to be understood as undervaluing the labours of those writers whom I am about to quote, or as desiring not to recommend, as being useful, any reference to their works. Very far from it : I have often been myself much indebted to several of them. And regarding points upon which there is little or no difference amongst us ; or, which have been so distinctly settled by the Church as to leave no room for variety of opinion ; or, once more, as to the true interpretation which we are to give to doubtful and seemingly contradictory rubrics ; the clergy, equally with

the laity, will do well to avail themselves always of their researches. But I would protest against the overrating any one among them: and against the placing one or two, or all together if it should be so, in the place which is alone due to the church of England herself.

To produce extracts from these writers will probably seem to some tedious and unnecessary: but I do not see how otherwise we can correctly estimate the present difficulty of the question which we are about to consider, or the value, in regard to it, of their different opinions. So different, it may be added, that they have at least involved in clouds much that would have remained plain and clear enough, if a more legitimate mode of interpretation had never been departed from.

CHAPTER II.

LET us first take the notes of bishop Overall, and of bishop Cosin, as they are printed in the additions to the folio edition of Nicholls on the common prayer. Upon *the confession and absolution before morning prayer* bishop Cosin says; “ In which confession, we remember our daily offences in general; and there is no means so powerful to obtain pardon for them, as the daily prayers of the Church to that purpose. So that the course which our Church here prescribeth, for the pardon of our daily offences, being put in practice, what can be more just, more due than to declare that forgiveness and absolution, which those that are (as they pretend to be) penitent for those sins, do obtain? What more comfortable, than to hear the news of it from his mouth, by whom the Church ministereth these offices? what more seasonable, than to do this before we come to give God His solemn praise and honour in our publick service, that we may be assured He accepts of the same at our hands.” The bishop makes a remark upon our superiority over “ other reformed churches” in this respect, and con-

tinues : “ The solemn beginning of our service with confession and absolution, serves ” [let me call the reader’s attention to this, *not* to convey remission of those sins which are confessed, but] “ to put the people in mind, that all which follows is the solemn service of Almighty God, preparing them to that attention of mind, and devotion of spirit, which they owe to it, and which is requisite to make it acceptable.”¹

I need only observe here, that I believe bishop Cosin stands alone in his reference of the confession and absolution to the whole course of the prayers about to follow, and which are, he tells us, the most powerful means we have to obtain pardon for our offences. Whether they be so or not, I shall not enquire ; perhaps I have mistaken the author’s meaning, and the whole passage is decidedly obscure. But this is, at any rate, evident and sufficient for my present purpose : namely, that bishop Cosin’s view of the matter is, that the absolution is a declaration of that forgiveness of sins which the truly penitent person obtains, in some way or other, from God.²

Upon the exhortation in the liturgy, that whosoever is unquiet in his conscience should go to some priest and receive the benefit of absolution, bishop Overall

¹ Additional Notes. *p.* 18.

² In the same collection, there is the following note soon after, *p.* 19. which does not amount to any thing, on either side of the question. This note is from some

MS. collections ascribed to bishop Andrewes. “ Because [the minister] speaks [the absolution] *authoritative*, in the Name of Christ and His Church, he must not kneel, but stand up.”

declares ; “ Confession of sins must necessarily be made to them, to whom the dispensation of the mysteries of God is committed. For so they which in former times repented among the saints, are read to have done. It is written in the gospel, that they confessed their sins to John Baptist. In the Acts they all confessed their sins unto the apostles, of whom they were baptized.” The meaning of this I take to be, not that particular confession of sins is necessary in itself and always, but necessary in order to that special absolution which persons are exhorted to seek for, that they may not come in scruple and doubt and unquiet to the holy sacrament.³

In the next page the same writer says ; “ It is most expedient that this [*the Exhortation*] be read, to induce the people, that they bethink themselves of the sovereign benefit of absolution, by their penitent confession.”

Upon the form in the visitation of the sick, bishop Overall further says : “ The church of England howsoever it holdeth not confession and absolution sacramental, that is made unto and received from a priest, to be so absolutely necessary, as that without it there can be no remission of sins ; yet by this place it is manifest, what she teacheth concerning the virtue and force of this sacred action. The confession is commanded to be special, the absolution is the same that the ancient Church, and the present church of Rome,

³ *Ibid. p. 43.*

useth; what would they have more? . . . Our *if he feels his conscience troubled*, is no more than is *si inveniat peccata*; for if he be not troubled with sin, what needs either confession or absolution? Venial sins, that separate not from the grace of God, need not so much to trouble a man's conscience. If he hath committed any mortal sin, then we require confession of it to a priest; who may give him, upon his true contrition and repentance, the benefit of absolution; which takes effect according to his disposition that is absolved . . . The truth is, that in the priest's absolution there is the true power and virtue of forgiveness, which will most certainly take effect, *nisi ponitur obex*, as in baptism.”⁴

I shall next take bishop Sparrow: and extract, from his explanation of “*the Absolution*” in the daily prayers, so much as will shew us his judgement upon the question before us. In that part of his book, the *Rationale*, he also considers (very naturally) the other two forms which the church of England orders, and the several occasions of them.

“ This absolution [the first] is an act of authority,⁵ by virtue of a ‘ power and commandment of God to

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 62.

⁵ I pass by some preceding remarks about the omission in the then rubric *to stand*. Bishop Sparrow wrote originally upon the Book of 1604: in which no such order was given. The bishop asserts that the minister ought to

stand: but, *as a fact*, the rubric, if it desired anything, desired the minister to kneel. But the writer's argument (and when in any case this is so, it is in various degrees suspicious,) required such an assertion.

His ministers.' And as we read *S. John* 20. *Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted.* And if our confession be serious and hearty, this absolution is effectual, as if God did pronounce it from heaven." The proof of this immediately follows : and I feel confident that, where we might have expected to hear the authority of the church of England appealed to, most persons will be startled at that which is produced. " So sayes" the bishop continues " the Confession of Saxony and Bohemia ; and so sayes the Augustan Confession, and which is more, so sayes S. Chrysost. in his fifth hom. upon Esay The same says S. Greg. Hom. 26. upon the Gospels S. Augustine and Cyprian, and generally antiquity sayes the same ; so does our Church in many places, particularly in the form of absolution for the sick : but above all, holy Scripture is clear, *S. John* 20. *Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them.*"⁶

Such is the argument on which bishop Sparrow grounds his assertion that if the general confession be sincere, then the absolution which follows is " effectual." When persons produce evidence which is not what they would have us to suppose, we are generally warranted in deciding against, at least in doubting, the correctness of the conclusions which they draw. There can be no one who will not think it very curious that the absolution in the morning and evening prayer is pronounced to be " effectual," because our Church

⁶ *Rationale. p. 17. Edit. 1668.*

has a form of absolution in her order for visiting the sick.

But we will pause a moment. These so-called proofs, (let their relative value be what they may, whether the judgements of holy fathers of the Catholic Church, or of Confessions of foreign protestants,) are to be taken as convincing evidence that when the priest in the daily office of the English church pronounces *the Absolution*, then that the truly penitent sinner is, at that very time, actually absolved. Now, in the first place, obscure as the Saxon, the Bohemian, and the Augsburg confessions of faith are upon this point of absolution, yet one thing at least is certain, that not one of them refers at all to public general confession and absolution, but, distinctly, to private absolution.⁷ Let it be understood that if they really

⁷ I shall not point out how inadequate and obscure in detail these confessions are, in their articles “*de pœnitentia*,” but it is right that the reader should see so much of them as relates to confession and absolution, in order that he may judge for himself. I presume these to be the places referred to by bishop Sparrow.

“ Itidem docent, ut pœnitentes sacerdotem accedant, peccataque sua Deo ipsi coram illo confiteantur, tametsi non præcipimus neque exigimus enumerationem peccatorum, consilium autem modumque vitañdi peccati, et per claves ecclesiæ absolutionem ab ipso pe-

tant, ut remissionem peccatorum, per hujusmodi ministerium, sic a Christo institutum, consequantur.

Item docentur homines, ut absolutionem magni faciant, credantque indubitate fieri, quod per claves promittitur, cum vox Christi sit, et mandato ejus expressa, Joannis vigesimo: Accipite Spiritum Sanctum, cui remiseritis peccata, etc. Sciantque clavum usu ac ministerio, Christique autoritate verborum, sibi omnia peccata condonari.” *Confessio Bohemica. Art. v.*

“ Cum hac fide in terroribus illis erigimur, consequimur certo remissionem peccatorum, sicut su-

did say what bishop Sparrow has pretended, nevertheless, in enquiring into the doctrine of the church of England we must at once and utterly repudiate and oppose their authority. I cannot allow that upon any single point whatever, let it be weighty or let it be light, the confessions and symbols, and formularies and books of prayer, put forth by foreign protestant communities, are to be listened to for a single instant, when cited to determine the true meaning of the Catholic church of England. Too long, unhappily for us all, too long have those documents by many been otherwise regarded: and we are, (God grant it may be only for a time) involved in almost inextrica-

pra ostendimus. Et hanc fidem concipiunt animi ex evangelio; item ex absolutione, quæ evangeliū annunciat et applicat per terrefactis conscientiis. Ideoque docent nostri retinendam esse in ecclesiis privatam absolutionem, et ejus dignitatem, et potestatem clavum veris et amplissimis laudibus ornant, quod videlicet potestas clavum administret evangeliū, non solum in genere omnibus, sed etiam privatum singulis, sicut Christus inquit, *Lucratus eris fratrem*, etc. Et quod voci illi evangeliī, quod ministerio ecclesiæ nobis in absolutione administratur, credendum sit, tanquam voci de cœlo sonanti.”
Confessio Augustana. 1540.

“ De confessione privata facienda pastoribus, affirmamus ri-

tum privatæ absolutionis in ecclesia retinendum esse; et constanter retinemus, propter multas graves causas. Sed simul docemus, non præcipiendam esse, nec postulandum enumerationem delictorum in illo privato colloquio: quia nec divinitus mandata est illa delictorum recitatio, nec possibilis est: et adducit pias mentes in dubitationem, et fidem languefacit. Magis vero hoc taxamus, quod nusquam adversarii in doctrina de pœnitentia vel conversione, mentionem faciant fidei justificantis, de qua supra dictum est: qua sola vere accipitur remissio peccatorum, et cor in sensu iræ Dei erigitur, et liberatur ex doloribus inferorum.” *Confessio Saxonica.* cap. xvj.

ble difficulties, into which we need never have been plunged, if we had been content to abide by and to follow the clear and steady guidance of our Church herself. But I pass on from this.

If the confessions cited by bishop Sparrow do not prove his point, how can we expect the fathers would? Still, let us hear them. "Heaven" says S. Chrysostom "waits and expects the priest's sentence here on earth; the Lord follows the servant, and what the servant rightly binds or looses here on earth, that the Lord confirms in heaven." And S. Gregory: "The apostles (and in them all priests) were made God's vicegerents here on earth in His Name and stead to retain or remit sins." Particular places are not given from S. Cyprian or S. Augustine; and I am quite content to leave without further remark the above two quotations.

Bishop Sparrow, a page or two after, proceeds: "There be three several forms of absolution in the Service . . . All these several forms, in sense and virtue are the same." If the writer were here merely speaking of the difference in the forms, as being the one declaratory, or another precatory, or a third authoritative, (and in such a way I suppose from the argument which accompanies it, that his opinion is to be understood) then another and a very different question is concerned. But, following so shortly upon his previous statements, and with nothing introduced by which we might comprehend that he is proceeding to a new subject, we are naturally induced to interpret

this as a further proof of what had been already advanced : namely, that the three forms are, as a fact in their use by our church, the same in effect and virtue. For, he concludes : “ So then in which form soever of these the absolution be pronounced, it is in substance the same ; an act of authority by virtue of Christ’s commission, effectual to remission of sins in the penitent.”⁸

There is yet one other passage, which ought to be included here. Whether, according to the commonly received notion of bishop Sparrow’s meaning, it is reconcileable with what has gone before, is not for me to enquire : but it bears upon and supports the extract already given from the notes of bishop Overall. “ *Here shall the sick person make a special confession, if he feel his conscience troubled with any weighty matter.* It would be considered, whether every deadly sin be not a weighty matter.”⁹

It will be observed, that I have all along been allowing that bishop Sparrow’s judgement is certainly agreeable to that of persons who believe that the forms of absolution in the daily prayers and in the liturgy, after the general confessions, do effectually convey remission of mortal sin. His argument is confused, and it may, after all, not be so certain as at first sight it seems. But however this may be, if it be not easy to understand the author of the *Rationale* in this part of his work, if it be still less easy to reconcile his state-

⁸ *Rationale*, p. 22—25.

⁹ *Ibid.* p. 331. *Visit. of the sick.*

ments in different places of the same book, I must altogether leave to others the attempt to reconcile this exposition, if it *must* be so understood, with his famous sermon preached before the university of Cambridge in 1637.¹⁰

In that sermon Sparrow says that confession is, of necessity, to be made to God: to which all men consent. “And,” he goes on, “no pardon to be hoped for, unless we confess to Him at least. But there is another confessor, that should not be neglected. He that would be sure of pardon,—it may seem strange if I *Italicize* words, so let the reader mark them for himself, ‘He that would be sure of pardon, let him seek out a priest, and make his humble confession to him; for God, Who alone hath the prime and original right of forgiving sins, hath delegated the priests His judges here on earth, and given them the power of absolution; so that they can, in His Name, forgive the sins of those, that humbly confess unto them.’” He supports this declaration by some extracts from the fathers, which, on this occasion (whether valuable or not) are at any rate to the point in hand, namely, the power in the priesthood to forgive sins. And he continues. “But to put all out of doubt, let us search the Scriptures; look into the xxth of St. John, v. 23rd. *Whosesoever sins ye remit, etc.* Here is plainly a power of remitting sins granted to the priest, by our blessed Saviour. . . . It is not the power of preaching, or baptizing, which is

¹⁰ I quote from the edition of 1722.

here given to the apostles ; but as the fathers interpret the place, *a peculiar power of pronouncing as God's deputed judges, pardon and remission to the penitent ; a power of absolving from sins, in the Name of God, all such as penitently confess unto them.* A form of which absolution our holy mother the Church hath prescribed in the visitation for the sick. He then, that assents to the church of England, or believes the scriptures, or gives credit to the ancient fathers, cannot deny the priest the power of remitting sins. And since he can, in the Name of God, forgive us our sins, good reason we should make our confession to him. . . . The only means to obtain this absolution, is our confession to him."

So, in his sermon, bishop Sparrow : and immediately after in the same sermon he speaks, in a single sentence, of our reaping "the great benefit of absolution" by a confession "publicly before the congregation." What the great benefit of *this* absolution is, he does not say. But it may be what the reader likes to make it, so long as it is not the same with the benefit of the absolution which follows special and oral confession. And before we can allow that bishop Sparrow intended us to conclude that both have the same benefit, we must convict him of what is worse than mere confusion of language ; that is, of wilfully leading people through a whole sermon to misunderstand his argument, which, after all, upon the strength of a single sentence at the end is to be made to signify nothing of the sort supposed. For let it be remembered that not only is the

priestly power of absolution (in the passages above quoted) and the exercise of that power asserted to be most strictly *judicial*, but also that the confession which is to precede it, whether to God or to the priest, must be "*integra et perfecta*. We must not confess by halves, acknowledging some [sins], and concealing others, but freely all that we can remember . . . All sins of weakness, all sins of presumption, all must be confessed, if we would have God to pardon all. His pardon is general, He never forgives one sin, but He forgives all ; and our confession must be answerable, we must confess not one but all, that after diligent search and examination we find we have committed."

Dr. Comber, dean of Durham, compiled a long work upon our Book of Common Prayer : the Companion to the Temple. He says : " The true judgement of the church of England concerning absolution may best be gathered from the Liturgy, in which are three forms of absolving set down. The first *declaratory* here, [he is speaking in this place of the daily prayer,] which is a solemn promulgation of pardon by a commissionated person, repeated every day when the whole congregation confess their sins, wherein they are assured of forgiveness if they repent and believe : . . . so that to those who truly do repent, it is present remission, to those that do not, it is a monitor that they may repent. . . . And this being pronounced to all the people, every one is to take his portion."

Upon this the reader will observe, that although Dr. Comber explains this absolution to be declaratory, or,

as he not improperly expresses it, “a promulgation of pardon,”¹¹ by which we must understand (for he is *distinguishing* the three forms) that it is nothing more than a promulgation, yet he says it is also “a present remission.” It is scarcely to be supposed that in one breath such a writer would contradict himself: and therefore I conclude that he cannot mean by those words that this absolution conveys and effects remission at that present time to the penitent. What else he might mean by it, it is not worth our while to enquire.

There is not the same obscurity in his explanation of the other two forms. “The second is *petitionary* in the communion service, where the minister lays down the promise, and on that ground, by virtue of his own office, begs of God to make that promise good. The third is *judiciary* in the office for the sick, wherein the priest having declared there is a pardon, and prayed for the sick person, doth by God’s authority, and as His substitute, declare him (whom he believes truly penitent) loosed from the guilt of his sins by Christ’s merit. But this so high and solemn office is not by our church prescribed to be performed, but only to a weak or dying man, nor to him, but upon his hearty confession, and being full of fear and sorrow.”

Whatever there is of doubt, if there is any, concerning the dean’s meaning in the above, is cleared by his fuller expositions of the two other forms, when, in the course of his work, he comes to the particular consid-

¹¹ *Oxford edit. vol. 1. p. 99. cf. p. 100.* “A bare telling of pardon.”

eration of them. The reader, who desires it, may refer to those parts in the third and fourth volumes. I shall now only further observe, that it would perhaps have been as well, if the identical terms used by our Church in her office for the sick had been adopted also by Dr. Comber: if (that is) in the extract just given, he had said “absolve” instead of “declare him loosed,” by which method he would have avoided confusion with his explanation just preceding of the “*declaratory*” form: and, if he had said “special” instead of “hearty” confession. One cannot conceive why he should not have done so, if he is really to be understood in the sense which his whole paragraph seems intended to carry. Indeed what other possible sense, in common honesty, can we put upon his words?

But it must not be overlooked that Dr. Comber in the above passage takes no notice whatever of the exhortation which, in the communion service, is made to those who have troubled consciences, to come and open their grief, and receive absolution. I am at a loss to account for this; more especially as in another place, upon this same exhortation, he plainly says, “if the conscience be wounded with guilt, he [the minister] hath power from Christ, upon our contrition, to give us absolution.”¹²

Next, Hamon L'Estrange: in his Alliance of Divine Offices. At the beginning of his book we are told, “Of absolution I shall treat in the communion of the

¹² *Ibid. vol. 3. p. 135.*

sick." Turning there, we find ; "*Confession and absolution.* Here the church approveth of, though she doth not command, *auricular confession.* But there being two absolutions mentioned in the former offices, it may be demanded, why only this is in the first person, *I absolve thee?* The answer is, there are three opinions concerning absolution. The first, entertained by a few, consider it *optative, precarious,* or by petition only, as praying for the pardon of the sins of the penitent. The second think it *declaratory* only, that is, pronouncing the penitent absolved, by applying God's promises to the signs of his contrition. Lastly, some contend that it is *authoritative*, as deriving power and commission from God, not to declare the party absolved but for the priest to do it, in words denoting the first person. All these three opinions our Church seemeth in part to favour, the first under these words ; *Almighty God have mercy on you, pardon, and deliver you.* The second under these words ; *Hath given charge and command to His ministers, to declare and pronounce to His people, being penitent, the absolution and remission of their sins.* The last by these words ; *I absolve thee.* Which authoritative absolution is rather proper here, because where the priest absolves in his own person, his absolution is not fitly applicable to any, but such as have given him evident tokens of hearty sorrow for their sins, such as Divine chastisements usually causeth : extendible it is not to whole congregations (as in the former instances) where the confession is too general to be conceived

in all real. And a confession at large can at most pretend but to an absolution at large, effectual only to such as truly and sincerely repent.”¹³

I do not hesitate to say that, except for the last few words, I should decide that L'Estrange's view of these absolutions was that the first is *declarative*, the second *optative*, and the third *authoritative*, in such a sense as to make the last only to be an actual exercise by the priest of the power of retaining and of remitting sins. Whether indeed this be the correct inference from his words, I must fairly say, is rendered at least doubtful by his concluding remark that however “large” the absolution may be, it is “effectual” to such as truly repent. The reader must form his own judgement about it.

The next, whose opinion we shall refer to, in order of time is Dr. Nicholls. He makes, in the first absolution, the sentence; “He pardoneth and absolveth all them that truly repent, and unfeignedly believe His holy Gospel,” to be “the absolving Form;” and explains that it both (as he terms it) *avoids* the ancient and modern Roman forms, which are in the first person, *Ego absolvo te*, etc.; and also is valid as a form. It is almost, nay, it may be asserted, quite impossible to discover from this author what he intended his readers to understand by his note upon the first absolution. He seems to speak of it as conveying pardon to penitent sinners, else he would not have remarked upon and distinguished “the absolving form;” yet he

¹³ p. 299.

goes on to say, that the *declarative* form was thought by our Church “more proper for daily use; as being less liable to the exceptions of those, who would be apt from thence to accuse the clergy, for aggrandizing their own office, by so frequently repeating the power which they are vested with.” If such language means anything, does it not appear that we are to conclude that the church of England claims and exercises in this absolution a power to forgive the sins of those who are truly penitent, and nevertheless seeks to conceal that power within the obscurity of altered language? Let this be the way of whomsoever it will to evade a seeming difficulty, I, for my part, never will consent to an opinion so pitiful and so disgraceful. The real question is, does the Church intend by this absolution to convey remission of sins to those who are truly penitent? It would be easier after all to interpret Dr. Nicholls as answering this question in the negative, if he did not in his paraphrase which follows the note, thus express himself: “God, . . . by the mouth of His minister, pronounceth pardon and absolution to every one of you that is endowed with the requisite qualifications for it.” But, in short; I acknowledge that it is hard to determine upon which side Dr. Nicholls is to be quoted; whether he believed this absolution to be, or not to be, a conveyance and not a declaration of God’s mercy and pardon to the penitent. Taking also, however, into our consideration his remarks upon the order that none except a priest is to pronounce it, he must, I conceive, be un-

derstood as insisting upon its being (although of purpose obscurely worded) an actual conveyance of pardon, and not a mere declaration. In which sense I shall refer to him, if necessary.

Upon the form in the communion Service, the same writer speaks with more decision. Before we come to it, it is well to quote his remark upon the exhortation, when notice of communion is given. "*That he may receive the benefit of absolution.* It is very plain," he tells us, "from this passage, that our Church does not condemn private confession and absolution: though she does not universally require them (as the church of Rome does) as being necessary for the pardon of all sins. She only recommends them as things very convenient to be put in practice, when persons cannot quiet their own consciences otherwise; but still leaves them at their liberty whether they will make use of this means or no."

The paraphrase which he gives of the absolution itself leaves no doubt that he regarded it as a declaration only of God's mercy. "This same good and gracious God hath ordered me His minister, to declare and pronounce His mercy to you, in pardoning and delivering you from all your sins, if you truly repent of them, as I charitably presume you do: and I put up my prayers for you to Him, that He may confirm you in a constant habit of virtue, etc." Hence Dr. Nicholls placed this second absolution in a lower place, so to speak, than the first.

It is scarcely to be wondered at, if we find our

author equally hard to be understood as to the effect and object of the absolution in the office for the sick : rather, I fear it must at last be owned that, seeking to please two parties, he evadest he question and decides for neither. “Our Church,” he observes, “has ordered that the sick person, when he is visited by the minister, may be moved to make confession of such sins, as he finds do trouble his conscience ; to the end that by the spiritual advice and comfort, which he may receive from him, his mind may be eased.” Here it must be objected, that this “advice and comfort” is not the end of such confession: but, whatever may be the value of absolution, absolution is the true and only end proposed. But Dr. Nicholls continues : “Our Church motions special confession, with relation only to such sins as disquiet the person’s mind . . . our Church does this, only with a view of instructing and comforting the sick person.” Not to repeat again the objection just mentioned, another occurs : for it is clear that the church of England is so far from “motioning special confession” only of some sin or sins in particular, that she orders “a special confession of sins, if the conscience is troubled with any weighty matter.” And I must request the reader very carefully to mark how material this distinction is.

The assertion is again repeated that this special confession is only in order to receive spiritual advice : and being so, Dr. Nicholls was very wise in explaining to us what the absolution which follows *is not*, instead of what it *is*. “It is not absolutely necessary

for the forgiveness of sins; it is not judicial and authoritative." With the first negative we unhesitatingly agree: and with the second also, in the sense in which the writer puts it; namely, that "God Almighty must not be thought to divest Himself of His inherent right of forgiveness of sins, which the scriptures say belongs to Him alone." It is sad to find in books, so called, of authority, questions and doctrines of the highest, nay, of vital importance, thus evaded, by sonorous and empty arguments against statements which every Christian would abhor; which have nothing whatever to do with the matter really enquired about; which, nevertheless, unhappily serve to blind the eyes of ignorant and hasty readers.

We come now to a ritualist, Wheatly, whose learning and judgement are to be readily acknowledged, and whose work is very generally referred to by our clergy; but as upon all points it is not probable that any one would consent to his decisions as final, so I shall not hesitate to controvert them upon this question of absolution. His book is in common use, and I shall endeavour therefore to state only, as briefly as may be, the conclusions at which he has arrived.

Wheatly considers the first absolution to be "an *actual conveyance* of pardon, at the very instant of pronouncing it, to all that come within the terms proposed;" and he distinguishes and rejects the opinion, which would have it to be merely a "*declaration* of the terms." In other words: he contends, "that since the priest has both power and commandment to

declare and pronounce absolution; therefore, when he does, by virtue of this power and commandment, declare and pronounce such absolution and remission regularly in the congregation; those in the congregation that truly repent and unfeignedly believe God's holy gospel, (though the priest does not know who or how many they are that do so,) have yet their pardon conveyed and sealed to them at that very instant through his ministration; it being the ordinary method of God with His church, to communicate His blessings through the ministry of the priest."

The author goes on to say that in this explanation he is sensible that he is carrying the point higher than many who have preceded him: among others, he specifies Dr. Marshall, the learned translator of S. Cyprian, who regards this absolution as nothing more than an authoritative declaration. And, indeed, with respect to the *effect* of this absolution, according to Wheatly's judgement, it does not seem possible to carry it higher; for it amounts to this: namely; that sinners, who are truly penitent, have their sins and guilt removed and their pardon *conveyed*, at the instant of (neither before nor after) the pronunciation of this form.

Wheatly (as the reader has observed) declares that the priest does not know who are and who are not, out of the members of the congregation, thus absolved: nor does he suggest any test or guide by which persons themselves might know whether their contrition, and mental confession, and resolutions of amendment,

and earnestness of faith have reached the point to which they must of necessity attain, before the pronouncing of the absolution shall be *effective* of so great results. For example, he does not say how any one during a whole life is to be made sure that the absolution in the public daily office has at last both conveyed and sealed to him, long truly (as he hopes) repentant, pardon and remission of sins. If yesterday, why not a week ago? if not to-day, why to-morrow, or a twelvemonth hence? But considerations like these will come before us, more properly, hereafter.

In support of his decision, novel according to his own admission, Wheatly brings some proofs. One, from the use of the term "pronounce :" "*To be pronounced by the priest alone.*" Now, let it be remembered, that a doctrine of absolution so extraordinary is made to rest upon the exact meaning of an English word, derived from the Latin : how far it is to be thus rested, it is of course impossible to say. So worthless an argument, even at the best, could settle nothing in an enquiry of such magnitude as that which is before us : and I remember few things in modern theology which, calmly considered, are so startling, as the attempt to determine one of the most mysterious and awful of Christian doctrines,—one of the most weighty in its consequences, one which involves continuance in a state of guilt, or change of condition in the sight of God,—by the meaning of a word, the only word which probably could, under any aspect, be well em-

ployed on such an occasion. But let us, for one instant, see whether the reasoning, so to call it, is correct.

Wheatly does not, as he could not, found any argument upon the received meaning of the English word, pronounce: it will be sufficient therefore to remark that our two best lexicographers, Johnson and Richardson, explain the word as signifying an open, public, or authoritative declaration of anything: in which sense the rubric, as far as English is concerned, must be understood. As to the Latin, *pronuncio*; this, we are told, “signifies properly to pronounce or give sentence: and therefore the word *pronounced*, here used, must signify that this is a sentence of absolution or remission of sins, to be authoritatively uttered by one who has received commission from God.”

I presume that Faccioli knew as well as Wheatly the meaning of a Latin word: if so, it is strange, that not only does he not give a like signification, as the proper one, of *pronuncio*, but he does not even allow it, except in an improper and unusual sense. To utter, to speak, to proclaim, to publish abroad;—these are interpretations of the word: in one case, when referred to a judge, *and then only*, does *pronuncio* ever signify, pronouncing sentence. And Wheatly himself had already plainly declared, that there is nothing whatever judicial, not a shadow or a pretence of it, in the “pronouncing” of this absolution. “The priest does not know who or how many they are that are so;” i. e. so absolved. So much for the boasted term “*to be pronounced*.”

The second proof alleged, is: “the priest reads his commission before he executes his authority.” The question is, whether he does, in reality, at that time so execute that authority. This must be left for us to determine as we proceed.

The third proof is very curious: “this form is not to be pronounced to such as the church desires *should* repent, but to those who *have* repented.” Were it indeed so, there might be something for me to reply to: but Wheatly himself forbids our entering on it at all, by assuring us, ten lines after, that the form is drawn up *declaratively*, because “it is to be pronounced to a mixed congregation;” i. e. of penitents sincere and insincere. With which (apparent?) contradiction, I think there can be no harm to leave this third proof.

Concerning the absolution in the liturgy, having expressed his regret that the ancient discipline has been laid aside, to the great detriment of the Church, Wheatly refers us to his remarks upon the first absolution in the daily office, and therefore attaches to it, also, the same interpretation.

The third absolution, in the visitation of the sick, would probably to many persons have seemed necessarily to fall within the same class, (i. e. as being a *conveyance* of pardon to the true penitent) because it could not possibly be placed higher. But Wheatly saw, I suppose, some difficulties in this: at least, many would occur to us, if he had not been so acute. And, therefore, it is not much to be marvelled at, although

(I doubt not) people have been somewhat mystified at a first glance of his explanation;—I say, it is not so much to be marvelled at, if he placed, as indeed he has placed, this third absolution far *below* either of the other two. This, we are told, only removes Church censures, and the punishment due to ecclesiastical discipline; those, on the contrary, removed and took utterly away the guilt of sins committed against God. Not to mention, in detail, several objections which would lie against any other mode of explaining, according to his own theory, this third absolution, and which will probably present themselves in the course of the present dissertation, I shall merely observe that the author could not but have seen that it alone was consistent with his preceding statements, for this single reason: that as the absolution must, from the very nature of the thing, mean something, and as that something (he saw clearly enough) must be different from the consequences of the two other absolutions, so there was literally nothing else left for it, in particular, to effect.¹⁴

In the year 1754 Mr. Warner published his “illustration” of the Book of Common Prayer: a large folio, something after the plan of Dr. Nicholl’s work, giving an exposition of the different parts, and a paraphrase of the prayers. Of the first absolution this author says; “It is extremely surprising that all the commentators on the common-prayer, except Dr. Bennett and Mr. L’Estrange, and almost all the clergy,

¹⁴ I quote from the late Oxford Edition, pp. 114. 283. 430.

should be of opinion, that the rubric of the absolution, directing it to be pronounced *by the priest alone*, should be intended to restrain it to one in priest's orders, and that it does not comprehend any minister that officiates, whether priest or deacon. Let the dispute as to the form of absolution, whether declarative or effective, be decided as it may, for it has not been decided by authority, yet nothing can be clearer, than that this distinction of *priest alone*, means the minister without the people. The confession preceding it, is to be said of the whole congregation after the minister, all kneeling; and then comes the absolution to be pronounced by the priest alone, standing, the people still kneeling. This was therefore intended to direct the people, not to repeat the words after the minister, as they had been directed in the confession, but to attend silently 'till he had pronounced it, and then to say, *Amen*. The word *minister*, and the word *priest*, as Dr. Bennett observes, are in this, and other offices, used promiscuously." Mr. Warner gives Dr. Comber's paraphrase, slightly altered, upon the second absolution, and Wheatly's explanation of that in the visitation of the sick: thus making the one merely optative, and the other to be a remission of ecclesiastical censures only. So that, however his conclusion might have been arrived at, or whatever the force and value of his reasoning, this writer did not regard either of the three absolutions as *conveying* remission of deadly sins, or as an exercise of the sacerdotal power of "the keys."

"The Elucidation of the book of Common Prayer"

by Mr. Shepherd was, some years ago, regarded with much respect by many members of our Church: there is little doubt that it has latterly fallen to its true level. Except by an ostentatious shew of somewhat commonplace learning, and by a continual endeavour to disparage his predecessor Wheatly, who was far superior to himself both as a ritualist and a theologian, the author of the Elucidation has but small means to support his claims upon our attention. But the age for which he wrote was not very discriminating, and positive assertions, especially if they were in harmony with the wishes and loose doctrines of the time, were readily received. It is probable however that many now living may, if they will, trace their present opinions upon various parts of our Book of Common Prayer to this work. Therefore it is necessary for me to lay before my reader the explanation of the three absolutions which is given in it. And I am bound to say, that Mr. Shepherd appears to have taken considerable pains in investigating this part of his subject, not only including it in the natural course of his Elucidation, but adding by way of an appendix further remarks.

Mr. Shepherd, after some observations on the propriety, to say the least, of a general confession and absolution before common-prayer, explains the absolution itself to be a declaration, and not a conveyance, of pardon to the repentant sinner. “The priest does not absolve in his own name. He simply promulgates the terms of pardon, granted by the Father of our

Lord Jesus Christ. That this may be misunderstood by none, is probably one reason, for which our form repeats the nominative case. ‘He’ that is, *Almighty God* ‘pardoneth and absolveth, etc.’” Whatever the intention of this absolution is, yet the most cursory reader, one would suppose, must have seen the weakness of such an argument in support of an elucidation of it like this; proving in reality nothing at all; for no one denies that it is God Who, alone, pardoneth and absolveth all them that truly repent. But to pass on: Mr. Shepherd thus continues, “Should there in a mixed congregation be any hypocritical worshipper, . . . to him the absolution gives no encouragement. It simply declares to him that there is forgiveness with God, and points out the terms on which it is granted. To those that truly repent, it conveys the strongest assurance of remission of sins and acceptance with God.”¹⁵ In order that the meaning of this passage may not be mistaken, it would be well to compare it with the explanation which Wheatly gives, a page or two above.

The force of the absolution in the communion Service is not allowed by Mr. Shepherd to be greater than, or indeed different at all from, that in the daily offices.¹⁶

The third absolution, in the visitation of the sick, is explained by the same author in his larger consideration of absolution in general, at the end of his

¹⁵ Vol. i. p. 56.

¹⁶ Vol. 2. p. 203.

second volume. He first declares that “the dispensation of absolution is reducible to these four heads. 1. The absolution of baptism, and of the supper of the Lord, or sacramental absolution. 2. The absolution of reconciliation to the Church, and re-admission into its communion. 3. The absolution of word and doctrine, or declaratory absolution. 4. The absolution of prayer, or precatory absolution.” It is not requisite to delay to examine the proofs of all this, or to shew how far they go in the support of it. Of the third absolution itself he tells us; “Since this very form declares that remission is granted only to the true penitent believer, that is to him alone whom God has already pardoned and absolved, and who cannot therefore need absolution from the hands of man, it must necessarily follow, that the power to absolve . . . is purely ministerial, or as our Church elsewhere expresses it, ‘the power and commandment given by God to His ministers *to declare and pronounce* to His people being penitent, the absolution and remission of their sins.’ ”¹⁷

I desire, as much as possible, not to bring forward living authors; and, therefore, the above are, I believe, all the writers who are commonly spoken of by our people equally with our clergy, as ritualists whose opinions are to be listened to as of weight and authority in explaining our Book of Common Prayer. But to these it is not improper to add Bingham; who,

¹⁷ Vol. 3. p. 489.

though he did not especially direct his attention to the illustration of our ritual and other offices, yet incidentally in his valuable book of Christian antiquities introduced much which is mixed up with the subject, and wrote upon this particular question of absolution some sermons and short treatises.¹⁸ To these last, therefore, we must I think pay also some attention.

His first sermon on absolution commences with a statement with which all must agree, that the sentence of men, as priests, in any act whatsoever is not unerring and infallible, except in so far as they observe the rules prescribed by their sovereign Lord. And then he distinguishes into four classes, the same exactly as those of Shepherd just mentioned (and who simply copied them from Bingham) the several methods by which the ministers of Christ exercise the power which they possess of retaining or remitting sins. Into three of these, those which relate to the administration of sacraments, to intercessions, and to public discipline, we need not enquire. I would only remark that it is very doubtful, as it seems to me, whether either Bingham or his imitator Mr. Shepherd could have sustained, upon their own theory, their distinctions of sacramental and precatory absolution : I mean, as distinctions, with especial reference to an actual exercise of the power of forgiving sins which our Blessed Saviour bestowed upon the priests of His Church. This, however, does not concern us :

¹⁸ Works. Vol. 8. p. 363

for it is certain that those distinctions cannot hold with what I believe to be the true and catholic doctrine.

Bingham refers the three absolutions in our Prayer-book to the one head “declaratory :” “ which consists in publishing the terms and conditions upon which the Gospel promises pardon and remission of sins. This is either general or particular.” As to the general ; “ the design of it is to excite and encourage all sinners to repent and turn to God in hopes of mercy, and to give consolation and comfort to all such, as do actually and sincerely turn to Him.” As to the particular : “ In that case the minister is authorized, not only to give those who labour under disquiet of mind ghostly counsel and advice, but also the benefit of absolution ; that is, if, upon a just examination of their case, he judges them to be real penitents before God, then he may not only declare to them the general promises of pardon, but assure them in particular, that as far as he can judge of their case by the visible tokens and indications of their repentance, he esteems them absolved before God, and accordingly declares and pronounces to them their absolution.”

This appears to be the result of Bingham’s arguments in his sermons and letters on absolution : a result which reduces, as I have said, the three forms to one class, emptying all equally of any spiritual effect, except simply that of comfort and consolation. Towards the end of his second letter he speaks again of particular absolution of the sick, but as he is there

representing statements which no one admits, such as that "a priest may open and shut heaven at his pleasure," it is not worth while to refer to them. It is sufficient to say, that he does not enlarge the limits of his previous explanation,

CHAPTER III.

WE must now pause. And first let us see to what extent we have obtained a resolution of our doubts as to the meaning and object of our Church, in the use of her three forms of absolution.

Whatever the effect of absolution may be, whether much or little, whether great or small, bishop Cosin refers it (unless I have mistaken his meaning) to the prayers of the whole congregation of the faithful which succeed: and he makes the three forms, as forms, to be declarative. This is one interpretation.—Bishop Sparrow in his *Rationale* assures us also that the three forms are to be understood as equal and the same in their intention, but authoritative by virtue of Christ's commission, and effectual to the remission of sins, by the infinite mercy of God, Who pardons the truly repentant. Whether this be indeed the correct way in which we ought to understand the bishop the reader must decide: it is not the way in which his *Sermon* explains the church of England doctrine of absolution. Let it, however, stand for a second interpretation.—Dr. Comber says that the first is declara-

tory, the second petitionary, the third judiciary. This is a third interpretation.—Dr. Nicholls makes the first form to be effective of pardon and an actual conveyance of remission of sins to the truly penitent; the second to be half declaratory, and half precatory; and the third *not* necessary, and *not* so judicial and decisive as to divest the Almighty God of His own inherent right of forgiveness of sins. This is a fourth interpretation.—Wheatly asserts the first two forms to be effective of pardon, conveying remission of sins: and that the third, being intended for another purpose, releases the penitent offender from ecclesiastical censures, and remits the penalties to which he is exposed according to the laws of public discipline. This is a fifth interpretation.—Mr. Warner declares that none of the forms are really an exercise of the power of absolution, that is, that by none of them remission of sins is actually given and conveyed in the sight of God. Nor do I see how, in reality, this view differs from that of Bingham and Shepherd. This is a sixth interpretation.

It would be an invidious thing, and I feel sure quite uncalled for, to attempt to point out, much more to pretend to insist upon, the very remarkable fact which is here disclosed. In the Book of Common Prayer and administration of the sacraments and other rites, according to the Use of the Church of England, there are three forms of absolution; ordered and adapted for certain separate and different occasions. Eight or nine writers, each of authority when

agreeable to the particular notions of those who cite them, give six discordant judgements as to the object, meaning, and effect of these absolutions. More than this, (let me not seek to disguise the matter) I have presumed to put forth a seventh interpretation, agreeing entirely with none of the preceding.

It is necessary that I should here repeat in as few words as possible what my interpretation is. So far as I am able to comprehend the teaching of our Church, she holds the grace of absolution to be given, and to be given only, to the true penitent after a distinct confession by word of mouth of all known and remembered sins: such confession to be made to a priest, not for the purpose of asking counsel and advice, but in order to receive absolution through his ministry.

Hence the third form in our office for the visitation of the sick, and the absolution contemplated and advised in the exhortation which follows the appointed notice of communion, alone convey and assure the grace of sacerdotal absolution, because they alone fulfil the required conditions. If this position be true, then as to the other two forms, which are contained in our Common Prayer Book, it is, comparatively, of no great consequence to examine very minutely into the extent of the spiritual graces which commonly accompany them. More than a declaration of comfort and consolation, by an authoritative assurance of the infinite mercy of God towards all who repent and amend their lives, with an exhortation so to amend,

the first so called absolution does not appear to be. Nor do I know that the second absolution, that, namely, which is in the Liturgy, although it may convey remission of venial sin, can in any important particular whatever be regarded as more than an earnest supplication to God for mercy towards all who are then present; a supplication which, we may well believe, He will especially listen to and answer, uttered as it is by His minister, at a time when both priest and people are about to enter upon the most solemn part of the most solemn Service which they can offer, and about to receive the best gifts which our Almighty Father gives to us His children, even the Body and the Blood of His Son.

But, it may be asked, is not the fact (supposing it to be a fact) that this absolution remits venial sin, in itself sufficient to distinguish it above and beyond a prayer, however earnest and solemn? I think not. Venial sins do not demand, under any aspect, a formal absolution: they may be removed, through God's mercy, in more ways than one. Immediate and sorrowful repentance, a repetition of the Lord's prayer, giving of alms, reception of priestly benediction, these and such as these are means by which we may trust that we obtain at once pardon of such offences.

I do not intend, neither am I called upon, to explain the difference between mortal and venial sins. Probably it would be vain to attempt accurately to distinguish them, and to map out, as it were, exactly where the one class ends and the other begins: or,

again, how far circumstances and accident alter the character of a sin, and make it at one time and to one person what it is not at another. Let whatever distinctions be drawn, every case must at last be left to each one's common sense and judgement to determine. But, generally, what I mean by venial sins are those sudden and obtruding thoughts ; those passionate, ill-governed, hasty words and deeds, which almost involuntarily sweep across the minds of all even the best and holiest, and hurry us into the quick doing of acts which we abhor. Having permitted them, though it may be only for an instant, we cannot (if we would) forget that such permission was a sin : yet, call it what we will, we know, we feel, it is not a sin of that kind which is “ mortal,” carrying with the commission of it the sentence of death. It is not,—call it, let me repeat, by what name we will,—it is not a sin of that kind which is deliberate, whether cherished and clung to in the heart, or executed in wilful disobedience by the tongue or any other member of the body.

I say then, that in common with some prayers and spiritual acts performed in faith, the second absolution may and often does remit sins,—lighter, venial sins,—of this class. In this respect it is an absolution, and yet not so distinguished by that quality as to alter in any way the essential character by which priestly absolution in its highest sense and meaning is raised distinct and clear from any approach to or imitation of it whatsoever. But, also, because it does remit

venial sin, it is, so far as I am able to discover, distinguished from the declaration, called an absolution, prefixed to our daily office.

I am desirous once more to say that it is not, after all, a matter of any material consequence whether, upon this particular point, I am right or wrong: nor should I be inclined to spend much time and argument with those who, after a careful comparison, are prepared to insist that both the public general forms are to be esteemed equal in their effects. From such a statement I should be content with a mere expression of individual dissent; nothing is involved in it which would not seem to suffer almost a total indifference about it, when set against the weighty consequences of the real question which is before us. In a word:—there appears to me to be evidence from the construction and language of the two public forms, sufficient to justify us in concluding that the first is a simple declaration of God's infinite mercy, but that the second is an actual conveyance of that mercy and pardon, to some certain though small extent. Let this be so or not as men may think: it is not worth debate; but what I do declare is this: that neither the one nor the other conveys and seals pardon of mortal, deadly, sins. Such pardon, so far as priestly absolution is concerned, is to be obtained, and to be obtained only, by that third way of which I have already spoken.

To return to the variations of ritualists which have been produced. I would use them for one end at

present, and for no more: that is, they shew that there could not have been, in justice, much reason for the loud outcry which in more quarters than one, has been made against this, the seventh interpretation. Have I said that the first absolution is merely declaratory? so do bishop Cosin, and Comber, and Warner, and Bingham, and Shepherd. Have I said that the second absolution is little more than the first, and yet that there is a distinction, being half-declaratory, half precatory? so does Dr. Comber, and with him Dr. Nicholls. Have I said that the third form is a conveyance of pardon to the repentant sinner? so do bishop Overall, and Dr. Comber, and (it may be) Dr. Nicholls.

Let it not be thought that anything whatever of my argument can be rested upon an agreement of this kind with others; an agreement which displays only with truth and accuracy the simple fact that it is at variance with all. I allude to such an agreement for no purpose except to shew,—and this I repeat—that the separate explanations which I had given may be supported, by the authority of some one and more separate names. Unfounded and unreasonable as the objections made against me have been, such an answer, worthless as themselves, is the only one which, justly, they have a right to demand.

But it is a miserable matter merely to be able to escape from condemnation. I am not content to think that the interpretation which I insist upon is but one of many which *may* or *may not*, according to indi-

vidual caprice or individual ignorance, be held without rebuke by our people and taught by our clergy. If any one of the above theories is the true one, all the rest are false. And are we for ever to remain disputing? is there no voice by which we may learn the truth? I believe that there is a voice, long neglected and forgotten, the voice of the Church of England. Let us listen to her teaching, and we shall find that now as of old, by the great grace of God, she does not speak with a doubting or hesitating tongue.

Here, though open to the charge of repetition, I must again lay down the principle upon which alone we can possibly decide what the judgement of the church of England really is; and to which principle we are bound to bring for proof, as to a test, every doctrine which we assert or deny.

We declare therefore that the Church of England now holds, teaches, and insists upon, all things whether of belief or practice, which she held, taught, and insisted on, before the year 1540, unless she has since that time, plainly, openly, and dogmatically asserted the contrary. This we declare in general. And, in particular, as regards that most important question, the right interpretation of the various services in our Common Prayer Book, we further add: that whatsoever we find handed down from the earlier rituals of the Church of England, and neither limited nor extended in its meaning by any subsequent canon or article, must be understood to signify (upon the one hand) fully and entirely all, and (on the other hand)

no more than it signified before the revision of the ritual.

In such a dissertation as the present, which aims at nothing beyond an attempt to ascertain the present judgement of our Church regarding absolution, it will be amply sufficient for me to shew what her doctrine was in the centuries immediately preceding the reformation, and the alterations which were either made at that period, or since. Whether this doctrine be true; whether it is agreeable to primitive practice and catholic tradition; whether, once more, it is founded upon and can be proved by Holy Scripture; all these are questions well worthy our best labours as stewards of the mysteries of God, and honest members of the church of England. Not only, however, do they not concern me now, but within the space to which my argument must be confined, they could not possibly be well treated of.

Few persons will deny that the existence of a doctrine,—known, acknowledged, and taught,—in the church of England at the beginning of the sixteenth century, coupled with the fact that no reformation or alteration of that doctrine has at any time since been made,—and therefore that it was intended to be still known, acknowledged, and taught,—is strong evidence by itself that such a doctrine must be true. The obligation to enquire accurately into it and if possible overthrow it, is in the first place upon the shoulders of those who are inclined to doubt or to dispute. It will then be for us to see if it can be defended.

One thing only I am bound to say, before I pass on. And it is this: that, equally on this matter of Absolution as upon all other essential portions of the One Faith once delivered to the saints, I believe that the church of England holds the true and complete doctrine of the Holy Gospel, and follows, in her practice of it, the example of the primitive age. Our Church now claims, in right of her succession, all the ordinary powers and privileges which the apostles received from their and her Almighty Lord: now offers to her children all the means, whether in aid of or as being necessary to the salvation of each one, which were offered from the beginning: and now, as of old and ever, either insists upon the reception, or entreatingly urges the acceptance, according to their various nature, of all and every of those means of grace.

One or two preliminary remarks are necessary, before the reader proceeds to examine the extracts about to be produced. In the first place I must remind him that it is proposed only to bring forward sufficient proofs in order to establish the fact of the doctrine anciently held by our Church: and this end will be gained by a selection from the many canons of councils which either incidentally or especially relate to it. Again; I shall not go back further than about the year 1200: to do so would be altogether unnecessary at present; as it would have no bearing whatever upon the immediate subject on which we are engaged. Three centuries before the reformation will balance

three centuries after it. Once more ; it is, above all, to be remembered, that by the term “*pœnitentia*” is commonly to be understood that ordinance, into the details and effects and parts of which we are now enquiring.

One word more as to the signification of “*pœnitentia*.” It would have been well if our writers generally had been more accurate in their use of the different terms, penance or absolution, and confession. Very much confusion has been caused by arguments against the necessity of confession being mixed up sometimes intentionally, with arguments against the necessity of absolution or penance. The necessity of confession, simply, and the necessity of confession in order to absolution, are two questions as distinct as it is possible for any questions to be. We may use, as convertible terms, *pœnitentia* or penance and absolution : but we may not so use in like manner, except in cases where no mistake can occur, the term, for example, “confession.” Confession, contrition, and satisfaction must, in some way and to a certain extent, precede the actual administration and conveyance of absolution : in other words they are the parts of “Penance.” We may say (as we will) either that “penance” is not complete, or that absolution cannot be obtained, unless these essentials shall have gone before.

In excepting, just above, from the strictness of this rule cases in which no mistake can happen, I alluded especially to the double meaning which the term *pœnitentia* itself frequently has. It is to be understood

sometimes for the ordinance or sacrament, and sometimes for the discipline or punishment which is appointed by the proper authority either to precede or follow it. For example, every reader of ecclesiastical history and of the Concilia must recollect, how very often the phrase occurs “imponenda est poenitentia:” or “poenitentiam confitenti imponat,” and the like. So in modern writers of the church of Rome we often find “penance” spoken of which is one thing, and “the sacrament of penance” which is quite another. Nor indeed is the use of “confession” instead of “penance” entirely confined to authors of later days. In the “Ordinarye of a Chrysten man,” the fourth division of the book which treats of this subject begins by letting the reader know that “there shall be fyrist put some thynges generall touchynge the sacrament of confessyon.”¹

¹ Edit. Wynkyn de Worde, 1506. *Sign.* P. i. v.

CHAPTER IV.

BOUT the year 1220 at a council at Durham, one of the canons was “de numero sacramentorum;” the first sentence of which, addressing priests, explains its object. “Cum in dispensatione sacramentorum vestrum consistat ministerium, ut sacramenta a vobis rite tractentur, singula per ordinem prosequamur. Sunt autem septem sacramenta, quorum quinque omnibus fidelibus sunt communia et necessaria.” Presently it continues: “Tertium sacramentum est pœnitentia, quæ ingressos in mundum, et lapsos in peccatum relevat et reparat.”¹ The same council has several other canons entering into further details; of which I shall quote one only. “Sacramentum autem pœnitentiæ quam sit necessarium probatur ex illo evangelii, *Quorum remiseritis peccata, remittuntur eis; et quorum retinueritis peccata, retenta sunt.* Sed quoniam remissionem peccatorum consequimur per veram confessionem, præcipimus, canonum statuta sequentes, etc.”

¹ Wilkins; *Concilia*, tom. i. p. 574.

The synodal constitutions of Alexander, bishop of Coventry, in 1237, declare : “*Cum pœnitentia consistat in tribus ; in cordis contritione, oris confessione, et operis satisfactione ; primo quærendum est ab illo, qui venit ad confessionem, si dolet se peccasse, etc.*” And in 1255, the constitutions of Walter Kirkham, bishop of Durham, make the knowledge of the particulars of penance a chief part of the duties of priests. “*Hi etiam, qui sunt sacerdotes, maxime sciant, quæ exiguntur ad veræ confessionis et pœnitentiæ sacramentum.*”²

In 1287, the canons of the synod of Exeter were published ; nor among the documents which illustrate the faith and practice of the church of England in those ages, are there any, short of provincial constitutions, which exceed these in value or authority. The first chapter is “*de sacramentis in genere. . . . Sunt autem vij. Baptismus scilicet, qui est janua omnium sacramentorum, et dicitur ingredientium, . . . unde prima tabula ducens ad portum salutis post naufragium appellatur . . . Quartum vero sacramentum est redeuntium, eo quod redeuntibus datur : propter quod secunda tabula post naufragium appellatur pœnitentia. . . Pœnitentia necessaria est adultis, qui post baptismum in crimen actuale inciderunt.*” The canons proceed to treat of these seven sacraments in order and in detail. We are now concerned only with the 5th ; *De pœnitentia.* “*Admiranda et multiplex Dei*

² *Ibid. p. 644. 704.*

misericordia humanis lapsibus ita subvenit, ut, non solum per baptismi gratiam, sed per pœnitentiae medicinam spes vitæ reparetur æternæ; ut qui regenerationis dona violassent, proprio se judicio condemnantes, ad remissionem criminum pervenirent. Mediator enim Dei æterni et hominum, homo Dominus Jesus Christus præpositis ecclesiæ hanc tradidit potestatem, ut sacerdotes confitentibus pœnitentiæ satisfactionem darent, juxta illud evangelii: *quorum remiseritis peccata, etc.* . . . Quod si quispiam confessus non fuerit, et communicaverit semel in anno, vivens ab ingressu ecclesiæ arceatur, et moriens ecclesiastica careat sepultura.”³ In the last sentence, confession is mentioned instead of “penance” or absolution; but here, and in all similar passages, confession is only so spoken of as necessary, in order to absolution: and it will be impossible to produce a place from any formulary or canon of the church of England, where confession is plainly declared to be necessary in any other sense, that is, except with that sole object in view. Nor, I may here remark, was such a style of writing and speaking in those days, when no doubt could arise as to the real meaning of the thing intended, difficult to be accounted for or improper in itself; although in later times much confusion (as before mentioned) has been the consequence. The necessity of previous confession was the truth which kept back people from obeying the command, incumbent then upon all the

³ Concil. tom. ij. p. 130.

members of the Church, that once at least in every year they should receive absolution. If the command was expedient (and whether it was so or not is a totally different matter) then the necessity of confession followed of course. And as on the one hand no one would refuse absolution if it might be had without the difficult duty of confession, and on the other none in his senses would dream of any necessity of confession except as a preliminary essential in order to absolution, it is not to be wondered at that we so frequently find^{*} confession enjoined, as if abstractedly and upon its own and sole account.

The very learned editor of the *Concilia* adds to the canons of this same synod at Exeter some further chapters from another manuscript:⁴ these are on the point before us, and it will be advisable to make one or two more extracts. The reader need not be reminded that we are concerned with an enquiry about the doctrine of the church of England, and not with a defence of the taste, so to speak, nor, indeed, of the correctness of the arguments by which it was, in those days, defended and insisted on. This manuscript continues : “ Christus medicus est altissimus et dat dimissionem in contritione, medicinam laxativam in confessione ; diætam injungit in observatione jejuniorum ; balneum præcipit in lachrymarum effusione ; phlebotomiam injungit in passionis Christi recordatione. Sed quid est medicina ? utique pœnitentia, de qua dicit Augusti-

⁴ “ Codex MS. ecclesiæ Exon.”

nus : ‘Pœnitentia non solum præteritum vulnus curat imo, sed animam ultra a peccato vulnerari non sinit.’ Sed aliqui dicunt, ‘Inveniemus misericordiam, et in fine pœnitebimus ;’ quia dicit Dominus : ‘Nolo mortem peccatoris.’ Contra dicit Augustinus sic : ‘Nullus debet spe misericordiæ in suis peccatis diutius remanere, sicut nec debet sibi vulnus procurare causa curationis futuræ ; quia qui peccatori veniam promittit, diem crastinum non promittit. Ex prædictis ergo patet, quod Pater et Filius et Spiritus Sanctus trinus et unus medicus est, quam Trinitatem offendit peccator per peccatum. Peccatum vero morbus est : pœnitentia est medicina, quæ per tres sui partes, scilicet contritionem, et confessionem, et satisfactionem, mitigat iram Trinitatis, quam peccando offendit peccator.’” Then follow directions for confessors : after which ; “consideratis his interrogationibus, suppleat discretus sacerdos ignorantiam pœnitentis, adhibita discretione prædicta in quæstionibus faciendis. Consideret autem sacerdos absolvere volens pœnitentem, si pœnitens sit christianus, id est, si fidem habeat. Quo invento, doceat eum sacerdos articulos fidei, quos ignorat. Deinde doceat eum, quod habeat contritionem amaram cordis. . . . Deinde videat et moneat eum sacerdos, quod habeat oris proprii confessionem veram et mundam, cum omnibus circumstantiis, quod omnia detegat, et hæc omnia faciat propter Deum. Deinde moneat eum sacerdos, quod voluntarie satisfaciat . . . et hoc totum sit propter Deum. . . . Est autem necessaria fides sacramentorum, et corum affectus ; scilicet, . . . quod

vera pœnitentia delet peccatum actuale, mortale, veniale. . . . Moneat etiam eum, quod solicite se custodiat, ne recidivet; . . . Et si forte labatur in peccatum, statim post lapsum redeat ad sacerdotem, et instructum penitentem sacerdos absolvat, et in pace dimittat.”⁵

I shall not continue to extract further notices from the canons and constitutions of diocesan synods, for not only would it demand more space than can be afforded in this treatise, but except in the way of detailed illustration it will not be required. The distinct assertion must suffice, that every order made concerning the rite of administering “Penance,” and every doctrinal allusion or explanation of it, and every direction given whether to the parish priest or to the people, are in accordance from the 13th century to the 16th with the statements above.

But the constitutions of provincial councils must not be passed over, nor, equal in importance with them, the legatine constitutions of Otho and Othobon. These are the highest authorities to which we can appeal, in order to learn not only what the doctrine and practice of the church of England was at the various periods when those constitutions were published, but also, and no less, what the doctrine now is, in so far as they have not been repealed by subsequent acts of equal authority, whether expressed in formularies or canons of discipline.

I shall not take these from the *Concilia*, but from

⁵ *Concil. tom. 2. p. 162.*

the Provinciale; on account of the glosses of the two great canonists, Lyndwood and John de Athon.

There is a short reference to absolution in a constitution of archbishop Stratford in 1342, respecting alienations by fraud or malice to the injury of the Church, which may be first noticed, not because it bears upon the exact question before us, but because of the principle which Lyndwood lays down at the beginning of his note upon it. “*Donantes . . . propter sui gravitatem excessus non obstante quacunque absolutione impensa a prædicta sententia ecclesiastica, careant sepultura.*” Upon this Lyndwood says; “*Absolutione. Quæ nemini in mortis articulo denegari debet. Et potest fieri per quemcunque habentem potestatem et exercitium clavum.*” He then enters into an examination of some difficulties mixed up with this particular constitution, and concludes by declaring that it is a special sentence, “*ex causa, sc. ad majorem terrorem.*” Wherefore it does not militate against but is to be regarded as an exception to the general rule, “*quod absolutus a sententia canonis non impedietur sepeliri in ecclesiastica sepultura, quia talis non decedit in peccato mortali, cum pœnitentiat se talem fraudem fecisse, et delictum suum confessus sit.*”⁶

The following is a constitution of archbishop Boniface in 1260. “*Cum sacramentum confessionis et pœnitentiæ secunda post naufragium tabula, ultimus*

⁶ Lib. 3. tit. xij. Cordis dolore. *verb.* Absolutione. Careant sepultura.

humanæ navigationis portus, ac finale refugium sit, unicuique peccatori pernecessarium ad salutem, sub pœna excommunicationis districtius præcipimus, ne aliquis præsumat impedire, quin hujusmodi sacramentum pœnitentiæ unicuique petenti libere impendatur, et spatium liberum confitendi."

Lyndwood's gloss is important. "*Confessionis.* Quæ, secundum Aug. est per quam morbus latens spe veniæ aperitur. Ad cujus intellectum nota, quod confessio tripliciter fit: aut in foro animæ interius coram Deo, aut in foro pœnitentiæ exterius coram Dei vicario, aut in foro contentioso coram judice. In prima confessione peccatum latens non aperitur, quia Deo apertum erat; in ultima non aperitur spe veniæ; in media vero aperitur peccatum latens spe veniæ. *Pœnitentiæ.* Cujus pars est confessio, ut dixi. Et nota, quod in hoc sacramento pœnitentia exterior est sacramentum tantum, actus confitentis est quasi materiale, actus autem sacerdotis, sc. absolutio, est quasi formale. Interior vero pœnitentia sive contritio non est actus virtutis per se; sed prout conjungitur pœnitentiæ exteriori saltem in proposito, sic est pars sacramenti, et res et signum. Res quidem pœnitentiæ exterioris est signum remissionis peccatorum, remissio autem peccatorum est res tantum. *Secunda tabula.* Prima tabula est baptismus, quo evadimus naufragium peccati originalis. Secunda tabula est pœnitentia, qua lapsi post baptismum evadimus naufragium peccati actualis. . . . *Finale refugium.* Hinc *Bernard.* ait, 'O felix pœnitentium humilitas, o

bona spes confitentium, quam facile vincis invincibilem, quam cito tremebundum judicem convertis in piissimum Patrem! etc.' *Pernecessarium ad salutem.* sc. animæ. Pœnitentia namque introducta est ad tollendum offensam et reconciliandum amicitiam. Et ad hanc sacramentaliter subeundam tenetur homo ex necessitate: omnis namque peccati sive originalis sive actualis est remedium Passio Christi, illius autem Passionis virtus in sacramentis ecclesiæ impressa est. Unde non possumus a peccato sive actuali sive originali sanari sine sacramentorum susceptione, vel in re, quando habetur opportunitas suscipiendi, vel in proposito, cum articulus necessitatis excludit sacramentum, et non contemptus religionis. Confessio vero pertinet ad sacramentum, institutum contra morbum peccati mortalis, ideo tenemur confiteri. Est autem confessio sacramentalis de jure Divino, non de jure naturali."⁷

The next chapter of the same title is a constitution of S. Edmund, about the year 1234. "In confessione habeat sacerdos vultum humilem, . . . nec faciem respiciat confitentis, . . . et patienter audiat quicquid dixerit, . . . et ei pro posse suadeat, et pluribus modis, quod integre confiteatur: aliter vero non est confessio." The gloss, so far as it relates to our special subject, is: "Integre. Ut sc. omnia peccata dicat, non dividendo ea inter diversos sacerdotes, sed uni totum dicat: nam Dominus summe bonus opus imperfec-

⁷ Lib. 5. tit. xvij. Cum sacramentum.

tionis non novit, aut enim totum hominem sanat, aut nihil. Et *Aug.* dicit; Caveas ne verecundia ductus, dividas confessionem: nam hoc est semper venia carere, ad quam putas per frusta pervenire. Aliæ enim sunt qualitates requisitæ in confessione, sc. ut sit discreta, hoc est, separata, et non generalis; item quod sit frequens; item quod sit humilis; debet etiam esse recta, i. e. sine vitio; item sui ipsius accusatoria, item verecunda, item voluntaria, item amara, item provida, item propria, item vera, item dolens, item individua. *Aliter vero.* sc. si non fuerit *integra.*"⁸

Passing by some other constitutions, full of matter most worthy of our consideration, but nevertheless not immediately respecting our especial subject, let us next take the following from the constitutions of archbishop Peccham, in 1281. "Sacramentum pœnitentiæ naufragantium remedium singulare, per quorundam insipientiam sacerdotum debito fructu caret, etc." Lyndwood says; "*Debito caret fructu.* Tria namque requiruntur, ut pœnitentia sit fructifera, viz. in corde contritio, in ore confessio, in opere satisfactio. Ex satisfactione enim colliguntur digni fructus pœnitentiæ. Quae quidem satisfactio in pœnitentia sacramentali requirit alium judicem quam sit ipse delinquens. Unde in sacramento pœnitentiæ contritio est quasi citatio ad comparendum coram judge. Et hanc sequitur rei apud judicem spontanea confessio. Deinde sequitur emendæ per judicem impositæ solutio. Et

⁸ *Ibid.* In confessione.

istud judicium differt a judicio fori contentiosi; quia in foro contentioso confessus condemnatur. Sed in foro pœnitentiæ absolvitur confessus. Fructus igitur sive utilitas pœnitentiæ est absolutio a peccatis, quam quis non consequitur ab eo qui non est suus judex, nec habet potestatem eum ligandi vel solvendi. . . . Sicut ad mundationem peccati originalis in baptismo valet ablutio aquæ, ita ad mundationem actualis culpæ valet absolutio sacerdotalis; quia istud sacramentum habet pro materia actum hominis. Unde et *Thomas* dicit, quod si ante absolutionem sacerdotalem aliquis non fuisset perfecte dispositus ad gratiam suscipiendam in ipsa confessione ex absolutione sacramentali gratiam conquereretur, si obicem non poneret. Itidem dicit *Petrus*, qui addit, quod sufficienter contrito datur ibi augmentum gratiæ.”⁹

Two more extracts ought to be taken from the provincial constitutions which have reference to the rule of discipline, at that time acted on by the church of England; viz. that all persons should be obliged to confess in order to receive absolution, at least once in every year. Both these which follow are from the constitutions of archbishop Sudbury, in 1381.

“ Moneantur etiam laici statim in principio quadragesimæ confiteri: et semper cito post lapsum, ne peccatum suo pondere ad aliud trahat.” Again. “ Confessiones ter in anno audiantur, ter communicari moneantur, videlicet in pascha, in pentecoste, et

⁹ *Ibid.* Sacramentum pœnit.

natali Domini. Quicunque vero semel in anno ad minus proprio confessus non fuerit sacerdoti, et ad minus ad pascha sacramentum eucharistiae non perceperit, nisi de consilio sacerdotis duxerit abstinentium, et vivens ab ingressu ecclesiæ arceatur, et mortuus Christiana careat sepultura, et hoc frequenter in ecclesiis publicetur."

From the constitutions we turn to the gloss of the canonist. " *Semper.* i. e. omni tempore etiam extra quadragesimam. *Cito post lapsum.* Habita sc. opportunitate. Sed contra hoc opponitur, quod sufficit semel in anno confiteri. *Solutio.* Illud potest intelligi, quando post poenitentiam receptam aliquis non peccat mortaliter, cui tamen consulitur, ut semel in anno confiteatur, licet non sit in peccato mortali, quia non debet se nimis assecurare. Vel dic, quod etiam loquitur de illis qui sunt in peccato mortali, viz. quod ad minus semel in anno confiteantur. Sed propter hoc non probatur, quod statim post peccatum non debeant confiteri, dummodo possint habere copiam sacerdotum, etc. *Pondere.* Ait enim *Greg.* 15. *moralium.* c. 20. Omne peccatum quod per poenitentiam non deletur, ipso suo pondere mox ad aliud trahit. Unde non solum fit peccatum, sed peccatum et causa peccati. Ex illo (inquit) vitio culpa subsequens oritur ex qua mens cæcata ducitur, ut poenitentia ligetur ex alia. Peccatum vero quod ex peccato oritur, jam non solum peccatum est, sed peccatum et poena peccati: quin justo Dei judicio omnipotens Deus cor peccatoris obnubilat, ut præcedentis peccati merito etiam in aliis

cadat." "Communicari. i. e. eucharistiam recipere, et loquitur de laicis. *Semel.* Immo pluries, quia ter ut patet *supra*. *In anno.* Sufficit igitur, quod quo-cunque anni tempore hoc fiat; nec tempus paschæ est de necessitate præcepti: et hoc verum de pœnitentia, sed de perceptione Corporis Christi tempus paschæ est de necessitate, secundum *Hostien.* et hoc probat litera *ad minus* posita in dicto *c. omnis*. Et ex hac litera videtur, quod peccator potest differre confessionem per annum. Sed contra hoc opponitur *de pœ. di.* 1. *multi*, ubi patet, quod nullam moram patitur vera conversio. . . . Et hoc tenent multi theologi, dicentes quod illud *c. omnis*, non dat licentiam differendi, sed prohibet confessionem negligi. In hac materia dicit *Joh.* quod confessio secreta, quæ fit soli Deo, non debet differri; sed confessio facienda homini bene potest differri: quia ad præcepta affirmativa non tene-tur quis ad semper, sed pro loco et tempore, quale est illud in dicto *c. omnis*. Unde dicit *Tho.* quod cum propositum confitendi sit annexum contritioni, quoties peccatum menti occurrit, debit peccator dolere, et conteri, et propositum confitendi habere. Sed ad confitendum actualiter non tenetur, nisi per accidens; ut quia semel in anno recipere debet Corpus Christi; vel quia est in mortis periculo, et in aliis casibus hujusmodi. *Ad minus.* hoc dicit, quia pluries potest communicare, ut patet *supra*, non tamen tenetur ex necessitate. *Ad pascha.* i. e. in festo paschæ, quando quilibet fidelis solet communicari. Et quod debet fieri in ipso festo, patet in *d. c. omnis*, ubi

dicitur, *in pascha*. Sed nunquid suspectus, qui non communicat in anno, potest ad hoc compelli? Videtur quod non: quia tale sacramentum non recipitur sine peccato, si recipiens sit in mortali peccato.”¹⁰

I shall make one extract from the constitutions which, under Othobon, were passed at the council of London in the year 1268, the archbishops and bishops of both provinces, abbots, deans, archdeacons, &c., being present. “*Omnis autem, qui confessiones aliquorum audiunt, a peccatis expresse confitentes absolvant, verba subscripta specialiter exprimentes, Ego te a peccatis tuis auctoritate qua fungor, absolvo.* Et quoniam confitens in ipso confessionis actu signa debet contritionis et humilitatis ostendere, præcipimus, ut omnes, qui confessiones audiunt, confitentes inducant, ut cum reverentia sacerdoti, et humilitate confiteantur peccata.”

John de Athon says upon this: “*Expresse. Hoc habet respicere dictionem sequentem confitentes; et tunc per hoc intellige excludi omnem velationem et palliationem, quæ tendere posset ad excusandas excusationes in peccatis: vel potest determinare dictionem absolvant hic sequentem, et sic hoc plenius declaratur in textu, qui hic sequitur. A peccatis. sc. istis mihi per te jam confessis, et ab aliis, de quibus non recordaris, auctoritate Dei Patris omnipotentis, et apostolorum Petri et Pauli, ac officii mihi commissi te absolvo, et hæc est sacramentalis absolutio. Absolvo. sc. te pœnitentem denuncio absolutum. etc. Signa.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.* Confessiones mulierum. Confessiones ter in anno.

Quæ vere insinuent signa hæc sequentia: adesse enim debent realiter confitenti in corde contritio, in ore confessio, in opere tota humilitas: et hæc est pœnitentia fructuosa. Unde in *psal.* *Cor contritum et humiliatum Deus non despicies.* Hæc autem evidenter ostenduntur per exteriora signa, quæ intus geruntur in anima.”¹¹

Yet there is one place in the gloss of the same Athon, on the constitutions of Otho, which should not be omitted. The constitution itself is directed especially to the confessions of clerks and priests. The words “ valeant confiteri” occur: on which the canonist remarks; “ *Valeant*, id est, possunt, non enim aliquis ad confessionem in foro pœnitentiali arctatur præcise, sed causative tantum, si velit esse de numero salvandorum. Libero namque arbitrio in sacramentis recipiendis quis relinquitur, quoties saltem de foro conscientiæ agitur. Ratio est, quia voluntarium militem eligit sibi Christus, coactum autem sibi actionatur diabolus, id est, per actionem vendicat. Item, quia a voluntariis peccata tantum contrahuntur, igitur talibus tantum remittuntur. *Confiteri.* Peccata tam mortalia majora, quam venialia: diversimode tamen confitentur ista. Nota etiam, quod in hujusmodi confessionibus in foro pœnitentiali simpliciter debet confessor stare ori et relationi confitentis, licet in foro judiciali eo casu secus esset dicendum.”¹²

I shall proceed from these decisions, to others of a

¹¹ *Constit. Othobon.* Quoniam cæca. ¹² *Cap.* Quod in quodam.

lower class, yet, though lower, of very high authority, as evidence of the doctrine and discipline of the church of England, in the centuries immediately preceding the reformation. The reader must be content, however, with some brief extracts from each, because it would be idle, as it is I am confident unnecessary also, to fill page after page with a mere accumulation of repeated statements.

First, the Summa of Hostiensis. In the fifth book of that great work we read : “ Misericors et miserator Dominus cuius misericordiæ non est numerus, ac salutem peccatorum sitiens, per hujus mundi pelagus periculose navigantibus, et quandoque fluctuantibus, remedia multa obtulit, inter quæ specialiter paravit duas naves, sive tabulas. Prima tabula est baptismus. . . . Secunda tabula est pœnitentia, quæ per peccatum mortale naufragium passis necessaria est. etc. . . . Quibus et quot diætis sit ad pœnitentiam properandum. Et quidem tribus, nam tres sunt diætæ, videlicet, cordis contritio, oris confessio, operis satisfactio. . . . Secunda diæta est confessio ; est autem confessio, secundum quod hic accipitur, canonica coram sacerdote peccatorum facta declaratio : et dicitur confessio, quasi simul vel ex toto undique fassio ; nam ille confitetur, qui totum et certum fatetur. *Quis debet confiteri.* Omnis peccator quicunque sit ille, qui actuale peccatum commisit. *Qualis debet esse confessio.* Voluntaria, amara, discreta, festina, frequens, integra. Voluntaria non coacta, sicut confessio Achor. Sed spontanea sicut confessio latro-

nis dextri in cruce. . . . Frequens, quod duobus modis intelligi potest. Uno modo sic, ut si frequenter cadit per peccatum, frequenter confiteatur: alioquin semel cadens, in terra semper prostratus remanet, nisi resurgat: ergo si frequenter cadit, et vult resurgere, necesse habet frequenter confiteri, ut sic per pœnitentiam resurgat, per hoc enim sacramentum non tantum semel sicut in baptismo, sed sæpe et sæpius subvenitur. Alio modo sic potest intelligi, ut etiam eadem peccata frequenter confiteantur. . . . Integra, ut scilicet omnia peccata dicat, ita quod nullum retineat. Nam Dominus summe bonus, qui opus imperfectionis non novit, aut totum hominem sanat, si scilicet integerrima sit confessio: aut nihil sanat, si scilicet aliquid conceleretur: . . . non peccata semel bona fide confessa iterum necesse habeo confiteri. etc. *Cui confitendum sit.* Sacerdotibus, quibus data est hæc potestas a Mediatore Dei et hominum, qui ipsos ecclesiæ suæ proposuit, et solvendi ac ligandi tradidit potestatem; et in hoc sacerdos judex est. etc. *Quando confitendum est.* Et certe quandocunque homo peccaverit. Unde et si sæpius cadit homo per peccatum, sæpe resurgendum per pœnitentiam, nec tardari debet confessio. Ad minus tamen semel in anno confiteri oportet, et in paschate ad minus (nisi de consilio proprii sacerdotis abstineat) debet recipere eucharistiæ sacramentum. . . . Confitendum est tempore sanitatis, et eo tempore quo homo potest peccare, sunt relinquenda peccata: et hæc pœnitentia certa est et indubitabilis. Si autem tunc vis agere pœnitentiam, quando peccare non potes,

peccata dimiserunt te ; non tu illa, et hæc pœnitentia est incerta, non tamen est deneganda.”¹³

Let us now take the Pupilla oculi. The author says ; “ Dicto enim primo de sacramento baptismi, per quod gratia inchoatur ; secundo de confirmatione per quam gratia robatur ; tertio de eucharistia per quam nutritur et consummatur, congrue iiiij loco sub-jungitur pœnitentia, per quam amissa gratia restauratur. Primo ergo notandum est quod pœnitentia iiij modis sumitur : . . . quarto modo sumitur pro remedio contra mortale peccatum actuale per ministerium sacerdotis collato seu conferendo, et sic est sacramentum. Pœnitentia prout est sacramentum est absolutio hominis pœnitentis, facta certis verbis debita intentione prolatis a sacerdote, jurisdictionem habente ex institutione divina, efficaciter significantibus absolutionem animæ a peccato. Aliæ vero quæ ponuntur quasi definitiones a doctoribus et sanctis . . . non sunt definitiones pœnitentiæ sacramentalis sc. exterioris ; sed potius quædam notificationes pœnitentiæ interioris quæ est res hujus sacramenti. Dicitur etiam pœnitentia illud quod a sacerdote imponitur pœnitenti in confessione, et hujus pœnitentiæ tres sunt species, sc. solemnis, publica, et privata. ¶ Solemnis pœnitentia quæ fit in capite quadragesimæ cum solemnitate : hæc pœnitentia non imponitur nisi ab episcopo vel de ejus mandato. . . . ¶ Pœnitentia publica est quæ fit in publico non tamen cum ista solemnitate. . . . Hanc

¹³ Rub. xxxviiij.

posset imponere quilibet sacerdos parochialis. . . . ¶ Privata pœnitentia dicitur illa quæ in secreto fit, et in secreta confessione a sacerdote imponitur. . . . ¶ Nota quod ante baptismum non requiritur pœnitentia sacramentalis: quia baptismus est fundamen-tum omnium sacramentorum. . . . ¶ In hoc sacramento exterior est pœnitentia sacramentum ut signum tantum scilicet interioris pœnitentiæ, et est ibi actus pœnitentis quasi materiale: actus autem sacerdotis, sc. absolutio, quasi formale. Exterior pœnitentia est sacramentum remissionis actualium peccatorum; res autem et non sacramentum est ipsa peccatorum actualium remissio; quæ est res tam pœnitentiæ exterioris quam interioris. Unde ut sui causam semper præsupponit pœnitentiam interiorem conjunctam exteriori in re vel in proposito; explicite vel implicite.”¹⁴

The succeeding chapter to the above, is “ de con-tritione :” then comes, “ de confessione :” with specific directions how it ought to be performed in order to absolution: and a consideration of various doubts which suggest themselves. I am not able now to dwell on these, but the reader will perceive that the follow-ing is much to the purpose which we have in hand. “ ¶ Item, per confessionem generalem delentur venialia. Pro quo nota quod duplex est confessio gene-ralis. Videlicet, una sacramentalis quando quis in secreto confitetur sacerdoti quædam peccata quorum meminit in speciali et alia venialia in generali, et

¹⁴ *Pars. v. cap. i.*

tunc illa generalis confessio ex iiiij habet quod valeat ad remissionem venialium in toto vel in parte: sc. ex contritione confitentis, ex humilitate confessionis, ex oratione sacerdotis, et ex vi clavium. Alia est confessio generalis non sacramentalis; quæ fit publice coram multis, et hæc habet efficaciam ad remissionem venialium ex tribus primis et non ex vi clavium. . . .

¶ Confessio vocalis non est de jure naturali; sed ex nova lege; nam in veteri lege non tenebantur homines ad confessionem distinctam et specialem, sed ad generalem et indistinctam quam faciebat sacerdos de peccatis filiorum Israel. Confessio autem mentalis est de jure naturali; sed tamen in lege nova confessio [vocalis] est de necessitate salutis ei qui peccatum mortale actuale habet, si adsit copia sacerdotis: tum quia Christus eam implicite instituit cum dixit leproso mundato: vade ostende te sacerdoti: tum quia Jacobus apostolus præceptum de confitendo promulgavit cum dixit, confitemini alterutrum peccata vestra: tum iij quia quibus data est potestas judicandi de aliqua causa, implicite datur eis potestas cognoscendi de ista. Sed Christus non solum apostolis quorum episcopi sunt successores, sed aliis discipulis quorum successores sunt inferiores sacerdotes dedit potestatem judicandi in foro conscientiæ, dicens, *quorum remiseritis peccata remittuntur eis*; quam potestatem sacerdos exercere non potest sufficienter nisi peccator ei per confessionem suam conscientiam aperiat. Cum ergo Christus sacerdotes constituit judices aliorum in foro conscientiæ, tenentur illi qui conscientiam vulneratam habent per

peccatum eam suo judici aperire. ¶ Item omnis adultus fidelis, sive vir sive mulier, tenetur omnia peccata sua simul saltem semel in anno confiteri fideliter proprio sacerdoti, ex præcepto ecclesiæ, et in pascha communicari. . . . ¶ Item ad confessionem statim actualiter faciendam tenetur quilibet si tunc debet sumere eucharistiam : ad quam nullus post [peccatum] mortale commissum, nisi confessus, debet accedere habita copia sacerdotis et necessitate non urgente. Similiter si periculum mortis immineat, statim tenetur homo confiteri. ¶ Item, si conscientia sibi dictet statim esse confitendum, similiter ratione dubii.”¹⁵

I again pass by some chapters which explain the ancient rules of restitution, and the different obligations and restrictions imposed upon an unlimited choice of confessors, according to the different ranks and positions of persons desiring to confess, and I shall lay before the reader one or two passages from the chapter, “*De modo audiendi confessionem et modo confitendi.*”

“Est hic advertendum quod sacerdos confessionem alicujus auditurus, primo debet considerare utrum sit parochianus suus, et si sit, audiat ipsum. Si non, remittat eum proprio sacerdoti : nisi in casibus supra notatis.” Then follows a general form of confession which might or might not be said : as at the conclusion the author states : “Hunc modum [confitendi] hic inserui, non ut ita dicatur omnino sicut scribitur ; sed ut

¹⁵ Ibid. cap. iij.

peccator ante confessionem in isto diligenter aspiciat et consideret in quibus peccatis ipse culpabilis fuerit; et ipsa sola dicat in sua confessione. Quia sicut nullum peccatum quod occurrit est occultandum in sua confessione: ita nullum peccatum de quo pœnitens non est culpabilis quovismodo ibi est dicendum. Finita narratione sive confessione pœnitentis dicat ei modeste confessor: Habesne plura dicere: et si pœnitens dicat se velle investigare si posset recolere, expectet sacerdos patienter quousque omnia dixerit quæ occurrent. . . . Expletis interrogationibus et confessione plene audita, consideret confessor an occurrat aliquod peccatum de quo pœnitens absolvitur non debet, ante restitutionem factam, vel saltem sine firmo proposito restituendi cum poterit. . . . ¶ Generaliter absolutio imponenda sub hac forma. ‘Ego auctoritate Dei Patris omnipotentis, et apostolorum Petri et Pauli, et officii mihi in hac parte commissi, absolvo te ab his peccatis mihi per te confessis, et ab aliis de quibus non recordaris.’ In constit. autem domini Othobonis, *quoniam cœca*, hæc forma traditur absolvendi: ‘Ego auctoritate qua fungor absolvo te a peccatis tuis de quibus es contritus et mihi confessus, et Dominus absolvat te, in nomine Patris, etc.’ Et præmitti debet oratio, ‘Misereatur tui:’ ne forte effectus sacramenti impediatur ex parte pœnitentis; et post absolutionem convenienter apponitur ‘In nomine Patris, etc.’ ad insinuandum quod sacerdos non propria auctoritate absolvit, sed quasi minister. Sed hoc relinquitur arbitrio sacerdotis nec requiritur in absolutione manus impositio,

quia hoc sacramentum non ordinatur ad exequendum aliquam excellentiam gratiæ, sed ad remissionem culpæ.”¹⁶

I shall make extracts from one more work of this kind, only: namely, the Manipulus curatorum: and these shall be as brief as possible. For, as I have before said, it is quite unnecessary to repeat again and again almost the same statements. In this book, the various distinctions of solemn, public, and private penance being explained, the author, as to the last proceeds: “Pœnitentia privata est illa quæ singulariter et private fit cum quis quotidie peccata sua secrete confitetur sacerdoti, et de ista specialiter hic intenditur. Pro qua sciendum quod quælibet perfecta pœnitentia habet tres partes; scilicet, cordis contritionem, oris confessionem, et operis satisfactionem . . . De confessione multa sunt consideranda . . . et primo de institutione confessionis. In sacra scriptura duobus modis accipitur confessio; uno modo idem est quod Dei laudatio . . . Alio modo idem est quod peccatorem coram sacerdote manifestatio. Et isto modo definitur sic, confessio est legitima coram sacerdote qui claves habet et potestatem absolvendi peccatorum declaratio. Dicitur primo, confessio est legitima peccatorum declaratio, contra illos qui peccata sua occultant, vel excusando vel celando. Dicitur etiam contra illos qui recitant bona sua in confessione, vel confitentur per abnegationem peccatorum: ut, non sum adulterer, gulo-

¹⁶ Ibid. cap. vij. et seqq.

sus, etc. Dicitur coram sacerdote qui claves habet et potestatem absolvendi, ut omnes conditiones quæ ad veram confessionem requiruntur ostendantur. Et dicitur confessio quasi simul vel ex toto sive undique fassio. etc.”¹⁷

“¶ Ca. ij. De illis qui tenentur ad confessionem. Omnes adulti postquam ad annos discretionis pervenerint, ita quod possint discernere inter bonum et malum, tenentur semel in anno. s. in quadragesima confiteri, ex statuto concilii generalis, Omnis utriusque sexus. Et hujus sacratissimi ac saluberrimi consilii potest esse triplex ratio. Primo fuit universalis indigentia: omnes enim peccaverunt, ut dicit apostolus, et egent gratia Dei . . . Secunda ratio est sacræ communionis reverentia. Cum enim omnes teneantur in pascha communicare, ut digne et munde possint accedere ad tantum sacramentum, oportuit præmitti remedium purgationis et lotionis peccati quæ fit in confessione. Tertia ratio fuit discretio gregis dominici, ne scilicet lupi absconderint in grege qui manducarent agnos. Ideo statutum est ut rectores ecclesiarum agnoscerent vultum ovium suarum, ne hæretici sub pelle innocentiae malitiam suam palliarent.”¹⁸

“Ca. iiiij. cui est facienda confessio. Quoniam ille cui est facienda confessio sacramentalis oportet quod habeat claves, videndum est primo de clavibus. Pro quo notandum quod hoc nomen clavis translatum est a corporalibus ad spiritualia. Clavis enim in corpo-

¹⁷ Edit. 1496. 12mo. fol. lxxxijj.

¹⁸ Ibid. fol. lxxxv.

ralibus est instrumentum ad removendum aliquod obstaculum quod impediebat ne posset bene haberi aditus ad domum, sic etiam in spiritualibus illud quod removet peccatum mortale, quod est obstaculum ad ingrediendum regnum celeste, vocatur clavis. Et ista clavis est triplex; nam quædam est auctoritatis, et istam habet solus Deus . . . Alia est clavis excellentiæ, et hanc solus habet Christus homo . . . Tertia est clavis ministerii, et istam clavem habent sacerdotes, et datur eis in collatione ordinis sacerdotalis.”¹⁹

“¶ *Ca. v.* de quibus debet fieri confessio . . . Debet ergo confessio esse de peccatis. Pro quo notandum quod peccatorum quædam sunt venialia, quædam mortalia. Quantum autem ad peccata venialia loquendo simpliciter non sunt confitenda de necessitate. etc.
 ¶ Unde notandum quod peccata venialia multis modis remittuntur, etiam absque confessione sacramentali. Uno modo per confessionem generalem quæ fit in prima, et in completorio, et in principio missæ.²⁰ Alio

¹⁹ *Ibid. fol. lxxxvij.*

²⁰ These general confessions are mentioned by some of the early ritualists. That in the Liturgy by Micrologus, *cap. 23.* In Gemma animæ. *lib. 2. cap. 64.* we find of prime and compline; “Ad completorium ideo confessionem agimus, ut quicquid in die commissimus, diluamus. Ad primam vero ideo agimus, ut quicquid in nocte peccavimus, puniamus.” See also Durand, *lib. 4. cap. 7.* and Inno-

cent 3rd *de mysteriis missæ. lib. 2. cap. xij.* who both distinguish this general confession from the “vera pœnitentia” and its necessary parts. And Hugh S. Victor somewhere says, “fit communis confessio ut mundemur a peccatis venialibus, sine quibus communis vita non facile ducitur.” *cit.* Bayly’s parallel of the Liturgy with the Mass-book, 4to. 1661.

To the same effect is Venerable Bede, cited by bishop Fisher:

modo per benedictionem episcopalem. etc. Intelligas tamen quando dico sic vel sic peccata venialia dimitti, quando. s. persona non habet nisi venialia, quia si haberet mortalia, nunquam sibi dimitterentur venialia quousque mortalia essent remissa ¶ Quantum autem ad peccata mortalia: dico quod omnia tam manifesta quam occulta tenetur quilibet distincte et sigillatim confiteri.”²¹

From these we will now return to the highest class of documents to which we can appeal: namely, to the synodical decisions of the church of England, and to authoritative works accepted by her. And, with regard to these, I am not aware of any which for an especial reason calls now upon our attention, from the date of the constitution of archbishop Sudbury, in 1378, above cited, down to nearly the middle of the sixteenth century, when various changes were most

“Coæqualibus quotidiana et lævia, graviora vero sacerdotibus pandamus, et quanto jusserrint tempore purgare curemus, quia sine confessione peccata nequeunt dimitti.” That is, by the sacrament of penance. *Opera.* p. 46. *Assertio viij Sacram.* De Pœnitentia. Compare also: “Neque enim dubium est cuivis erudito, quin factus sit per baptismum Christianus initium aliquod creaturæ Dei, hoc est, nova per gratiam inchoatus sit creatura. Verum hanc creationem facile perdit, admisso lethali crimen, quo fit ut revertatur ad

diaboli servitutem. Amisit enim regenerationem quam prius accepit, neque Dei jam, sed diaboli filius efficitur. Non ita tamen, quod oporteat eum denuo baptizari, sed pœnitentiæ sacramento, jam satis ei fuerit reconciliari, qua et gratiam amissam illico recuperabit. Cæterum nihil opus erit hoc fieri propter veniale peccatum, aut propter manentem post baptismum fomitem, quem gratia quotidie minuit, et purgat, donec totius hominis fiat perfecta consummataque novitas.” *Ibid. p. 372.*

²¹ *Ibid. fol. xcijj.*

distinctly made in many points both of the doctrine and discipline of our Church.

There is however a general order passed by the convocation at Oxford, in 1408, under archbishop Arundell, which deserves attention. “ Item, quia turpis est pars, quæ non convenit suo toti, decernimus et ordinamus, quod nullus hujusmodi prædicator, aut alia quævis persona de sacramento altaris, matrimonio, peccatorum confessione, aliove quocunque sacramento ecclesiæ, seu fidei articulo, aliter doceat, prædicet, aut observet, quam quod per sanctam matrem ecclesiam reperitur discussum. Nec vertat in dubium, quod per ecclesiam terminatum fuerit, aut decisum, nec verba scandalosa circa eadem scienter proferat, publice vel occulte, neque sectam aut speciem hæresis quamcunque prædicet, doceat, vel observet, contra sanam ecclesiæ doctrinam.”²²

We will therefore proceed to examine the dogmatic formularies of the church of England, published and enjoined to be observed, in the sixteenth century. I shall use the edition of those documents, so far as it contains them, published at the Oxford Clarendon press in 1825.

First come the Articles about Religion, set forth in the year 1536. These declare; “ Thirdly, concerning the sacrament of penance, we will that all bishops and preachers shall instruct and teach our

²² Lyndw. Provincial. *App. p.* quia. cf. Wilkins. *Concil. tom. 3.* 65. cf. ibid. *Lib. v. tit. 5.* Item *p. 317.*

people committed by us unto their spiritual charge, that they ought and must most constantly believe, that that sacrament was instituted of Christ in the New Testament as a thing so necessary for man's salvation, that no man which after his baptism is fallen again, and hath committed deadly sin, can, without the same, be saved, or attain everlasting life.

. . . *Item*, That this sacrament of perfect penance which Christ requireth of such manner of persons, consisteth of three parts, that is to say, contrition, confession, with the amendment of the former life, and a new obedient reconciliation unto the laws and will of God, that is to say, exterior acts in works of charity according as they be commanded of God, which be called in scripture, *fructus digni pænitentia*.

. . . *Item* . . . the second part of penance is necessary, that is to say, confession to a priest, if it may be had; for the absolution given by the priest was instituted of Christ to apply the promises of God's grace and favours to the penitent.

Wherefore as touching confession, we will that all bishops and preachers shall instruct and teach our people committed by us to their spiritual charge, that they ought and must certainly believe that the words of absolution pronounced by the priest, be spoken by the authority given to him by Christ in the gospel.

Item, That they ought and must give no less faith and credence to the same words of absolution so pronounced by the ministers of the church, than they would give unto the very words and voice of God

Himself if He should speak unto us out of heaven, according to the saying of Christ, *Quorum remiseritis peccata, etc, et qui vos audit, me audit.*

Item. That in no ways they do contemn this auricular confession which is made unto the ministers of the church, but that they ought to repute the same as a very and expedient and necessary mean, whereby they may require and ask this absolution at the priest's hands, at such time as they shall find their consciences grieved with mortal sin, and have occasion so to do, to the intent that they may thereby attain certain comfort and consolation of their consciences.”²³

It is not requisite for me to quote the Institution of a Christian man, published in 1537, inasmuch as it does little more than repeat the assertions of the Articles of the preceding year, in this matter of absolution.²⁴

In the year 1539 the famous act of the Six Articles was passed. The preamble of this declares that the king's majesty had proposed certain articles touching christian religion to his parliament, synod and convocation; “Whereupon after a great and long deliberate and advised disputation and consultation had and made concerning the said articles, as well by the consent of the king's highness, as by the assent of the lords spiritual and temporal, and other learned men of his clergy in their convocations, and by the consent of the commons in this present parliament assembled,

²³ Formularies, p. 8.

²⁴ *Ibid.* p. 96.

it was and is finally resolved, accorded and agreed in manner and form following, that is to say, . . . sixthly, That auricular confession is expedient and necessary to be retained and continued, used and frequented in the church of God.”²⁵

In the year 1543, the Necessary Doctrine was put forth. In this work which enters at greater length into the doctrine of the sacraments, the reader will perceive, where it varies from the preceding book, the Institution, a clear indication of some of the changes which were about to be definitely decided on. And this is perhaps the case also (for I would speak doubtfully) in “the sacrament of penance.” A passage in the Preface may first be quoted, wherein the compilers state; “Incontinently after [the articles of the creed] followeth the explication of the seven sacraments, wherein God ordinarily worketh, and whereby He participateth unto us His special gifts and graces in this life.”

“*The sacrament of penance.* For the clear understanding of this sacrament, it is to be considered what penance is, and also what is the sacrament of penance.

Penance is an inward sorrow and grief of the heart for the sins by us done and committed, and an hatred and detestation of the same, with an earnest desire to be purged from them, and to recover again the grace and favour of God by such means and remedies as God

²⁵ Ecclesiastical Statutes at Large. vol. 1. p. 161. cf. Wilkins. *Concil. tom. 3, p. 845.*

hath appointed for the obtaining thereof, with a steadfast purpose and mind never to offend again And this penance is a thing so necessary for man's salvation, that without it no man that offendeth God can be saved, or attain everlasting life.

The sacrament of penance is properly the absolution pronounced by the priest upon such as be penitent for their sins, and so do knowledge and shew themselves to be. To the obtaining of which absolution or sacrament of penance be required contrition, confession, and satisfaction, as ways and means expedient and necessary to obtain the said absolution. In all which ways and means faith is necessarily required as the ground and foundation of all things that are to be done, for to attain the benefit of the sacrament of penance. For who can have true penance, with hope to attain any grace of remission of sin thereby, unless he believe steadfastly that God is, and that in the New Testament, by the mean of our Saviour Jesus Christ, and by the force of His passion, there is promise made to His church to grant remission of sins by His ministers to such as falling from the grace received in baptism, do at His calling turn unto Him by penance. And . . . every man, before he entereth into the ways of fruitful penance, must have for a ground and foundation such a belief as whereby he hopeth and looketh, by the sacrament of penance, to attain remission of all his sins, whereunto we do come (as is aforesaid) by contrition, confession, and satisfaction.

. . . And being moved and troubled in spirit, and lamenting the miserable state which he is now in, by his own default, is pricked and stirred in his heart, according to the teaching of his mother, holy church, to repair to such a minister as God hath ordained to pronounce the sentence of remission of sin. And knowing him to occupy that place, as deputed of God, doth prostrate himself to God, and there humbly proceedeth to confession, wherein he, calling to his remembrance his sinful life past, doth knowledge to the priest all such sins in which his conscience telleth him that he hath grievously offended the goodness of God Almighty; and the same before the priest, God's minister, he declareth and uttereth with his mouth."

Then follow some explanations that by satisfaction, which also the penitent is to be ready to make, is to be understood first what it is; namely, such discipline and ways of reformation as the priest shall think convenient; and a desire to please God with an humble, lowly heart, ready to bring forth fruits in deed, as in alms, prayer, and fasting, with all such means as may serve for the cutting away of the occasion of sin, as the minister shall think good, according to the word of God. And, secondly, what satisfaction is not; namely, it "is not so to be taken as though the penitent sinner could worthily merit or deserve remission of sins by any pain or punishment to be by him suffered, or to make to God any just or full recompense equivalent to the sin that he hath committed against Him, and so to satisfy, which he can never do; for

that satisfaction hath only our Saviour Christ wrought in His glorious passion.”

The book continues: “ Whereupon, after this contrition had in heart, confession made with mouth, and satisfaction shewed and promised, the penitent may desire to hear of the minister the comfortable words of remission of sins. And the minister thereupon, according to Christ’s gospel, pronounce the sentence of absolution; unto the which absolution the penitent must give credence, and believe with a perfect faith that his sins be now forgiven freely by the merits of Christ’s passion, to the which forgiveness he hath recourse by the sacrament of penance, as he had at the first entry unto Christ’s religion by the sacrament of baptism.”²⁶

Once more: in another place the Necessary Doctrine declares, that “ by the sacrament of penance, they that be fallen into deadly sin may be restored unto the state of grace received in baptism, and so made again the lively members of Christ’s mystical body.”²⁷

I should wish to add to the above some notices from the Concilia, not a little important in such investigations as the present; furnishing, as it were, supplementary evidence of the exact doctrine held by the church, in the way of proving what opposite doctrines she opposed, from time to time, as heretical.

In the year 1368, the following position, with many

²⁶ Formularies, p. 257.

²⁷ *Ibid.* p. 293.

others, was condemned in a rescript to the university of Oxford, by archbishop Langham: “ 13. Pro quilibet peccato commisso in statu fidei, est remedium sufficiens in natura, per quod redire potest viator ad gradum deperditum per peccatum ; error.”²⁸

A provincial synod under archbishop Courtney, in 1382, condemned this as an heretical conclusion: “ Item, quod si homo fuerit debite contritus, omnis confessio exterior est sibi superflua vel inutilis.”²⁹ And in consequence of this, very shortly after, some suspect clergy were obliged to declare their assent to the received doctrine, or rather their recantation of the error charged against them. “ Quod si homo fuerit debite contritus, omnis confessio exterior est sibi superflua et inutilis ; concedimus quod est hæresis.”³⁰

Among several Lollard heresies of which some persons at Leicester were accused before the same archbishop in 1389, was this: Item, quod peccatorum confessio facienda sacerdoti non est necessaria : et quod quilibet bonus homo, licet literaturam nesciat, est sacerdos.”³¹ And, again, in 1405, this among other positions was publicly recanted by a certain priest before the bishop of Norwich ; “ Item, quod peccatorum confessio facienda sacerdoti non est necessaria. I say that this article is false and erroneous.”³²

²⁸ Wilkins. *tom. 3. p. 76.*

²⁹ *Ibid. p. 157.*

³⁰ *Ibid. p. 162.*

³¹ *Ibid. p. 208.*

³² *Ibid. p. 283.*

The case also of Sir John Oldcastle, as given in the records of the convocation. He first put in before his examiners a paper, in which, with other matters, he stated ; “ Also as for the sacrament of penance, I believe that it is nedfull to every man, that shall be saved, to forsake synne, and do due penance for synne bifore doon, wyth trewe confession, very contrition, and duhe satisfaction, as goddes lawe lymiteth and techeth, and ellys may not be saved.” But, not only this but other parts of his schedule appearing evasive, he was further questioned, and on a later day distinctly stated, as the record proceeds to say : “ Quo-
etiam-ad sacramentum pœnitentiæ et confessionis, dixit
et asseruit expresse tunc ibidem, quod si quis esset in
aliquo gravi peccato constitutus, a quo ipse surgere
nesciret, expediret et bonum esset sibi adire aliquem
sanctum et discretum sacerdotem, pro consilio ab eo
habendo. Sed quod confiteretur peccatum suum pro-
prio curato vel presbytero, etiamsi haberet copiam
ejusdem, non est necessarium ad salutem ; quia sola
contritione peccatum hujusmodi deleri posset, et ipse
peccator purgari.”³³

In the year 1521, a mandate was directed to the bishop of Hereford by cardinal Wolsey, to enquire after heretical books, and at the end was added a catalogue of some “pestiferous errors” from the works of Martin Luther. Of these the 5th was : “ Tres esse partes pœnitentiæ, contritionem, confessionem, et satisfac-

³³ Wilkins, *tom. 3. p. 354.*

tionem, non est fundatum in sacra scriptura, nec in antiquis sanctis christianis doctoribus." And the 8th; "Summa pœnitentia, optima pœnitentia nova vita."³⁴

A few years after, a public instrument was made by the archbishop and bishops, giving extracts from many books about that time published "in the Englishe tongue, conteyning many detestable errorrs, and dampnable opynyonys." Among them; from the *Booke of the wicked Mammon*, that "our prelats in synne say they have power." Here the term prelates is perhaps to be understood in its wider and not in those days very unusual sense, of parson or curate. Whether this be so or not, there follow these from *The obedience of a chrysten man*. "Improbat confessionem auricularem. f. 83. Every man is a preest, and we nede noon other preest to be a meane." And from *The revelation of anticriste*, "Nombring of synnes maketh a man a more synner, ye a blasphemer of the name of God." Again; "The most spirituall man of all, if he confesse his synnes to a preest, synneth, for he shulde confesse against his will, for this sentence standeth firme and stable, he that doth a thing against his will, doth it not, and compellid service please not God." From the *Exposition into the seventh chapitre of the firste epistle to the Corinthians*; "Thow owest nothinge to God but faith and confession; by confession, I meane not the whispering of synnes into the prests eare, ne yet the confes-

³⁴ Wilkins. tom. 3. p. 692.

sion of thy synnes to God, but with Saint Paule, if thou confesse with thy mowthe that Jesus is Christe, and beleve in thy hart that God hath raysed him from dethe, thou shalt be saved; in all other thinges he geveth the libertie after thyne own will, thou mayest do all thinges without all jeopardie of conscience.”³⁵

Once more: in the year 1536, the clergy of the lower house of convocation brought to the upper house a formal complaint of dangerous opinions then taught. Among them, “ 3. Item, that priests have no more authority to minister sacraments than the laymen have. 26. Item, that confession auricular, absolution, and penance are neither necessary nor profitable in the church of God. 29. Item, that it is sufficient for a man or woman to make their confession to God alone. 32. Item, that it is sufficient that the sinner do say I know myself a sinner. 59. Item, that it is preached, because auricular confession hath brought forth innumerable vices, it is clearly to be taken away.”³⁶

³⁵ Wilkins. *tom. 3. p. 728. etc.*

³⁶ *Ibid. p. 805.*

CHAPTER V.

 HAVE now, it is to be hoped, proceeded so far in this investigation, as justly to be able to call upon the reader to consider what may be concluded from the extracts which he has examined.

Let me assure him, and that no less earnestly than honestly, that I believe those extracts to have been fairly made: I am not aware that any statement has been omitted which would bear upon and influence the decision to which, I suppose, we must come. Whilst I fear that upon the one hand it may seem that there has been a repetition of proof and an accumulation of evidence, yet on the other it could not but be necessary to produce the books which have been quoted, because they contain, undeniably, the received doctrine of the church of England from the 13th to the 16th centuries.

Nor do they merely contain it; for they are the sources to which we must go, if we would learn what that doctrine really and authoritatively was. If there is any dispute or doubt concerning it, in them and from them we must obtain witness of the fact. By

their aid, moreover, we shall be preserved from consenting idly and hastily to assertions, by whomsoever made, which either by exaggeration would bring false and railing accusations, or, by pretending to explain the truth would in reality deny it.

I shall, therefore, now conclude, that in the year 1547, the doctrine of the church of England regarding Absolution was, that it is a sacrament instituted by our Blessed Lord ; that power to administer it was given by Him to His apostles, and in them to all who should be their successors in the holy office of the priesthood ; that none except priests can absolve ; that in its effects, when duly received, it takes away all guilt of sins whether mortal or venial, (having been mercifully appointed as an especial and sure remedy against them,) and restores the penitent to a state of grace ; that as baptism is “ *prima tabula*,” so absolution is “ *secunda tabula post naufragium* ;” and that as baptism avails to the washing away of original sin, so, after baptism, absolution cleanses from actual sin ; that confession to a priest, by word of mouth, as an essential condition, must ordinarily precede absolution ; that this confession must distinctly include all remembered deadly sins ; that absolution is not to be denied to any one ; and not only not denied, but that all persons, of sufficient age, are bound by the law of the Church to confess, in order to be absolved, three times or at least once every year ; that the consequences of continued disobedience to this law, would be exclusion during life from participation in the

sacraments and other spiritual privileges of Christian membership, and after death, from burial in consecrated ground and with holy rites; that confession must, nevertheless, be voluntary, even as it must be complete and plain in detail; that the sacrament of the blessed eucharist is not to be received without previous confession and absolution, by any who are in their consciences guilty of mortal sin; that remittance of venial sins and of venial sins alone may be obtained by means of the general public confession and absolution before some of the daily offices, or the liturgy, in the same way as it may be obtained by other pious acts of faith or practice; and, lastly, that under certain rules, requisite to prevent evasion, all persons are at liberty to choose for themselves the priests to whom they will confess.

Nor is it to be forgotten that this doctrine was founded upon the promise and commission given by our Blessed Lord, as recorded by the evangelists, S. Matthew and S. John. "Verily I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." And; "When He had said this, He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained."

Such then being the doctrine of the church of England in that year, as to the nature, the essential parts, and the effects of priestly absolution, our next step

will be, an examination of her ancient service books and ritual, so far as absolution in either of its meanings, whether the greater or the less, is concerned with them. For this purpose I shall confine myself to the offices according to the use of Sarum : with which, in every essential particular, the other great use, the use of York, exactly agreed.

First, the Breviary, from whence our present order of morning and evening prayers is taken.

“ Confiteor . Misereatur . et Absolutionem . tam ad primam quam ad completorium per totum annum. Confiteor dicitur privatim ut vix audiatur a choro, hoc modo.

¶ Sacerdos respiciens ad altare. Confiteor Deo, beatæ Mariæ, omnibus sanctis,

Vertens se ad chorum :

Et vobis : peccavi nimis cogitatione, locutione, et opere, mea culpa ;

Respiciens ad altare :

Precor sanctam Mariam, et omnes sanctos Dei,

Respiciens ad chorum :

Et vos, orare pro me.

Chorus respondeat ad eum conversus :

Misereatur.

Postea primo ad altare conversus :

Confiteor.

Deinde ad sacerdotem conversus ut prius sacerdos se habuit : deinde dicat sacerdos ad chorum :

Misereatur vestri omnipotens Deus, et dimittat vobis omnia peccata vestra : liberet vos ab omni malo : con-

servet et confirmet in bono : et ad vitam perducat æternam. Amen.

Absolutionem et remissionem omnium peccatorum vestrorum, spatium veræ pœnitentiae, emendationem vitae, gratiam et consolationem Sancti Spiritus, tribuat vobis omnipotens et misericors Dominus. Amen.”¹

Next, the Liturgy :

“ *Officio missæ inchoato, cum post officium Gloria Patri incipitur, accedat sacerdos cum suis ministris ad gradum altaris, et dicat ipse confessionem, diacono assistente a dextris, et subdiacono a sinistris, hoc modo incipiendo :*

Et ne nos.

Sed libera.

Confitemini Domino quoniam bonus.

Quoniam in sæcula misericordia ejus.

Sacerdos dicat :

Confiteor Deo, beatæ Mariæ, omnibus sanctis, et vobis : quia peccavi nimis cogitatione, locutione, et opere, mea culpa : precor sanctam Mariam, omnes sanctos Dei, et vos orare pro me.

Ministri respondeant.

Misereatur vestri omnipotens Deus, et dimittat vobis omnia peccata vestra, liberet vos ab omni malo, conservet et confirmet in bono, et ad vitam perducat æternam.

Sacerdos. Amen.

Et postea dicant :

Confiteor.

¹ Edit. Reynault. Paris. 1535. 4to. sign. I. ij.

Quo dicto, dicat sacerdos,

Misereatur, ut supra.

Deinde dicat sacerdos :

Absolutionem et remissionem omnium peccatorum vestrorum, spatium veræ penitentiæ, et emendationem vitæ, gratiam et consolationem Sancti Spiritus, tribuat vobis omnipotens et misericors Dominus.

Ministri respondeant : Amen.

Deinde dicat sacerdos :

*Vers. Adjutorium nostrum, etc.*²

Thirdly, and lastly, the Office of the visitation of the sick. This office, after some verses with their responses, and some prayers, proceeds to order that before the sick man receive the holy communion, the priest should exhort him to bear his sickness patiently : and it proceeds :

“ Frater carissime, quia viam universæ carnis ingressurus es, esto firmus in fide

¶ *Deinde bonum et valde expediens est ut sacerdos exprimat infirmo xiiij articulos fidei, etc.*

¶ *Deinde dicat sacerdos.*

Carissime frater : quia sine caritate nihil proderit tibi fides, . . . ideo oportet te diligere Dominum Deum tuum super omnia ex toto corde tuo, et ex tota anima tua : et proximum tuum propter Deum sicut te ipsum : nam sine hujusmodi caritate nulla fides valet. etc.

¶ *Deinde stabilito sic infirmo in fide, caritate, et spe, dicat ei sacerdos :*

² Ancient Liturgy of the church of England. 2nd. edit. p. 12.

Carissime frater: si velis ad visionem Dei pervenire, oportet omnino quod sis mundus in mente et purus in conscientia: ait enim Christus in evangelio: Beati mundo corde, quoniam ipsi Deum videbunt. Si ergo vis mundum cor et conscientiam sanam habere, peccata tua universa confitere: etc.

C Deinde audita integra confessione infirmi, et factis interrogationibus expedientibus, injungat sacerdos infirmo quod si quid injuste alieni habuerit, vel si quem injuste læserit seu damnificaverit, reddat et satisfaciat si valeat: sin autem, veniam humiliter postulet. Attamen non injungat ei sacerdos aliquam pœnitentiam, sed dicat ei benigniter hoc modo:

Frater, tu tot et talia peccata commisisti; pro quibus si tu esses sanus talem pœnitentiam debes agere usque ad tale tempus. . . .

Deinde dicat sacerdos hoc modo:

Misereatur tui omnipotens Deus, et dimittat tibi omnia peccata tua; liberet te ab omni malo; conservet et confirmet in bono, et ad vitam perducat æternam. Amen.

C Deinde absolvat sacerdos infirmum, ab omnibus peccatis suis, hoc modo, dicens:

Dominus noster Jesus Christus pro sua magna pietate te absolvat: et ego auctoritate ejusdem Dei Domini nostri Jesu Christi, et beatorum apostolorum Petri et Pauli, et auctoritate mihi tradita, absolvo te ab omnibus peccatis his de quibus corde contritus et ore mihi confessus es: et ab omnibus aliis peccatis tuis de quibus si tuæ occurrerent memoriæ libenter confi-

teri velles: et sacramentis ecclesiæ te restituo. In nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti. Amen.”³

The above are the forms of absolution to which the three forms in our present Book correspond; and from which, it will be at once evident, they are derived.

I have shewn what was the judgement of the church of England, upon absolution, in the last year of the reign of king Henry the 8th, before any alterations, affecting doctrine, had been made in her service books. I shall now remind the reader, that even if it had not been plainly stated by writers of authority, that the absolutions joined to the daily offices and to the liturgy do not convey remission of mortal sin,—in other words, that they are little more than earnest mutual and alternate supplications to the Almighty by both priest and people for pardon and grace, (the first for the second, and then the second for the first) not absolutely and actually conveying that pardon,—it would have been a necessary consequence from the acknowledged principle, that oral confession is an essential condition which must always, as a rule, be required of every penitent before priestly absolution from mortal sin can be given. I say, as a rule: and the exception sometimes recognized, was both so distinctly limited and based on such extreme danger of immediate death, that it served only to establish and to clear from all shadow of doubt the stringency of the rule.

³ *Monumenta Ritualia. vol. 1. p. 74—80.*

Here also before we proceed it will be well to trace higher these earlier rituals, upon which, as I have said, our present offices are formed, from which they are derived, and to which, in fact, they owe mainly their authority as being the voice of a true branch of the catholic Church in all formal acts whether public or private. We must be confined only to private absolution.

This is not a fitting place to attempt an account of “penitentials.” Every student of ecclesiastical history knows well how very accurately and minutely they enter into the details of the ordinance of absolution. The very end and object of them was to enable the priest to learn, in general cases, the proper discipline for various sins, and the wise method of treating or advising a penitent. Being so, how important a fact in this enquiry are the penitentials of archbishop Theodore, of venerable Bede, and of archbishop Egbert: men, who could almost remember the landing of S. Augustin.

It may be said that these penitentials chiefly have respect to the public penances which in those days were commonly performed. This may or may not be correct. It does not at all follow that because they would answer such a purpose, they were necessarily to be employed for that only. But, however this may be, the penitential of archbishop Egbert tells us especially how private absolution was to be given.

The rubric is: “*Incipit qualiter suscipi debeant paenitentes.*” And after some admonitions to the

priest, the order continues. “ *Cum ergo venerit aliquis ad sacerdotem confiteri peccata sua, prius in secreto cordis sui hæc apud se debet orare.* ”

Domine Deus omnipotens, propitius esto, etc.

Cum autem accesserit ad te, dic super eum hanc orationem.

Deus qui omnium confitentium, etc.

Item alia. Da nobis, Domine, ut sicut publicani.

Confessio peccatorum. Quando volueris confessionem facere peccatorum tuorum, viriliter age et confortare in Domino, et noli erubescere: et quia inde venit indulgentia cum spe misericordiae Dei humiliter confessus fueris peccata tua, et reliqueris ea, quia sine confessione non est indulgentia. In primis prosterne te in terra ad orationem . . . ut Deus omnipotens dignetur tibi dare sapientiam perfectam, et intelligentiam veram, et virtutem animi constantem ad confitendum veraciter ex infimo corde peccata tua; et postea surge, et cum fiducia, et vera credulitate dic ei cui confiteri vis peccata tua.”⁴ Then the priest is directed to say several psalms, with three other prayers for the penitent; after which he is to examine him as to the articles of the Creed, and whether he knows the Lord’s Prayer. “ *Post hæc interroga eum crimina sua quæ habet. . . Dic mihi*

⁴ The prayer ends thus: “ *Santa et individua Trinitas miserere mei, et dona quæ posco. Sancta Dei genitrix, cum angelis et omni-*

bus sanctis, intercede pro me misero, ut Deo donante puram facere valeam confessionem, quia aliter salvus esse non possum.”

opera quæ fecisti et cogitasti.” Then follow some forms of confession, intended to lead the penitent to confess fully all his sins ; that is, those sins there included which he had happened himself to have committed ; schemes, rather than forms : ending thus ;

“ . . . Omnia fient in pura confessione Domino Deo omnipotenti, et tibi Dei amico et sacerdoti, et rogo te cum humilitate, ut digneris orare pro me infelice et indigno, ut mihi dignetur per suam misericordiam dare indulgentiam peccatorum meorum.

Et dicit sacerdos.

Omnipotens Deus, qui dixit qui me confessus fuerit coram hominibus, confitebor et ego eum coram Patre meo, ille te benedicat, et det tibi remissionem peccatorum.”

Then succeed some other prayers, collects, and psalms, to be said according as the time will allow : after which ;

“ *Benedictio super pœnitentem.*

Misereatur tui omnipotens Deus, et dimittat tibi omnia peccata tua, liberet te ab omni malo, conservet te in omni bono, et perducat ad vitam æternam. Per.

Alia. Sis namque absolutus a Deo Patre, et Filio, et Sancto Spiritu, ab omnibus tuis peccatis, similiter etiam sis absolutus a sanctis apostolis, et martyribus, et confessoribus, sive ab omnibus timentibus Dominum, et a me quamvis indigno, et hic, et in futuro sæculo. Amen.”⁵

⁵ Morinus, *De pœnit.* Antiqui pœnitentiales. p. 13.

Alcuin was a contemporary and disciple of archbishop Egbert. His book *de divinis officiis* explains, in one chapter, the rites in his day observed *In capite jejunii*. He first declares that the priest's duty is to admonish all persons that they are bound to confess and be absolved at that time of the year. Then he gives a long account of various crimes, much after the manner of a penitential. After which ;

“ Denique sacerdos suscipiens pœnitentem, si laicus est dimisso baculo, quisquis vero ille est, sive laicus, sive clericus, sive monachus suppliciter se inclinet ante sacerdotem. Tunc sacerdos dicat hanc orationem : Domine Deus omnipotens, propitius esto, *etc.* Deinde jubeat eum sacerdos sedere contra se,⁶ et colloqui cum eo de supradictis vitiis, sive exhortationibus divinis, ne forte pro verecundia aut ignavia sive oblivione aliquid putridum in corde remaneat, per quod iterum diabolus eum ad vomitum peccati reducat.”

Then, says Alcuin, examination into faith was to be made : and he is not singular in this arrangement. For the old orders varied in this respect : some placing the confession first, some and more of them placing it after the profession of faith. “ Quo facto, fixis genibus in terram, et super ipsa innixus stans, suppliciter tensis manibus, blando ac flebili vultu respiciens sacerdotem, dicat his verbis : ‘ Multa quidem et innu-

⁶ Morinus observes : “ Omnes antiqui rituales confessionem peccatorum sedendo editam testantur.” *De pœnit.* p. 213.

merabilia sunt alia peccata mea, quæ recordari nequeo, in factis, in dictis, et cogitationibus, etc.' . . . Post hæc vero dicat sacerdos super eum has orationes." The prayers are not given by Alcuin, only the first words of them : they were well known, and are common in the penitentials. The whole ends with directions that if time and opportunity would permit, both the priest and penitent should go into the church, for the purpose of special prayer and communion.⁷

The reader will not forget that these are offices which were in use among our forefathers eight hundred years before the reformation. And I suppose that he will recognize their value as evidence both of the continued stream of doctrine in the church of England, upwards to its source ; and of the uniformity of practice which prevailed, in its more important features, for so many centuries.

⁷ Bibl. patrum. *Auct. tom. 1.* p. 239.—244.

CHAPTER VI.

HE first document which meets us at the period of the revision of our Service Books is of a most important character in all enquiries into the history, whether of the discipline or of the doctrine of the church of England. A document of especial weight in its bearing upon the question with which we are at present engaged. I mean *The Order of the Communion* put forth in the year 1548.

Here let me say that I shall altogether pass by any argument whether for or against the relative authority of this Order, of the two Books of king Edward, of Elizabeth, of James, and of the Book of Common Prayer of 1662. The last has been undeniably accepted and agreed to by the church of England, and by the temporal estates also of the realm. It is very true that there are, as regards the others, various formal deficiencies which, it may be said, diminish their authority: but really, after all, as we know that each later one was, confessedly, based upon the preceding; as, moreover, the intermediate Orders from 1547 to 1662 were virtually, if not formally, without

dispute used and obeyed with very few exceptions by all the members of our Church ; it does seem to me to be rather a splitting of straws than a reasonable objection, to distinguish between the authority of the one Book as greater than another. I would not be so foolish as to pretend that we ought to forget facts : whether weighty or not, whether the conclusions which we draw from them are always equally correct or just, they nevertheless are facts, and must both remain so and be dealt with accordingly. However, be this as it may, I shall now consider these several Books as equally decisive links in the chain of authoritative evidence, by which we are bound to test and to learn the true doctrine of the church of England.

The order of the communion, set forth in 1548, was intended to be used only for a season, until a more complete revision of the service-books could be settled ; and no alteration whatever was made in the liturgy itself, except the direction both that the priest should consecrate a larger quantity of wine, and that he should not, as of old, consume the whole of it himself. This necessarily followed from one chief object for which the order was prepared ; namely, that the laity should receive, according to the practice of the primitive ages, the holy communion of the Body and Blood of our Blessed Lord in both kinds, and not in one kind only.

This, however, although one chief effect and purpose of the order of 1548, was not the only one. There was another, by which the people were left at liberty

to avail themselves or not, as they might judge expedient, of the sacrament of absolution. The obligation to confess and to be absolved, before communion, was distinctly and totally removed. And upon this second point, no less than upon the first by which the Cup was restored to the laity, I entirely believe that the church of England returned to primitive practice, and was to be supported in her decision by the plain words of Scripture.

In the warning of communion which was to be given to the parishioners on some day shortly preceding, the priest, according to this order, first declared to his people the duty of all persons who intended to receive the sacrament: namely, that they must come (in a word) “in the marriage garment required of God.” Next, he was to tell them of “The ways and means thereto.” First, that they must sincerely repent of all former sins; that they must confess them to Almighty God; and ask of Him pardon, with inward sorrow and tears, and with a promise to Him by themselves of future amendment. So much as regarded their duty towards God. As concerning their neighbours, they were to put away all hatred and malice, to be reconciled if possible, and to forgive as they would be forgiven. These were the ways, and these alone, by which it was *necessary* that all persons should prepare themselves for communion; thus they were to clothe themselves “in the marriage garment” and “be found worthy to come to such a table.”

But if persons feared to rely upon their own judge-

ment ;—if, in spite of all prayers and sorrow and tears and promises of amendment made secretly to God, they still could not be certain that they were fit so to come ; if they still doubted whether their past sins really were forgiven them, and whether *their* garment in which they clothed themselves were indeed sufficient to appear at “such a table,” and were indeed the “garment required of God ;”—then, equally in full accordance with the practice of all antiquity, and with the Word of God, another means was offered by which they might be assured. But let us hear the order itself.

“ And if there be any of you whose conscience is troubled and grieved in any thing, lacking comfort or counsel, let him come to me, or to some other discreet and learned priest, taught in the law of God, and confess and open his sin and grief secretly ; that he may receive such ghostly counsel, advice, and comfort, that his conscience may be relieved, and that of us, as a minister of God, and of the church, he may receive comfort and absolution, to the satisfaction of his mind, and avoiding of all scruple and doubtfulness : requiring such as shall be satisfied with a general confession not to be offended with them that doth use, to their further satisfying, the auricular and secret confession to the priest ; nor those also, which think needful or convenient, for the quietness of their own consciences, particularly to open their sins to the priest, to be offended with them that are satisfied with their humble confession to God, and the general confession to the church ;

but in all these things to follow and keep the rule of charity ; and every man to be satisfied with his own conscience, not judging other men's minds or acts, whereas he hath no warrant of God's word for the same."

At the time of the administration of communion, the priest was again to exhort the people about to be partakers. Nor were these repeated exhortations in any wise uncalled for, now that each one was left at liberty to ask, or not to ask, for absolution ; and, because so left, was laden with the responsibility of deciding for himself whether he might believe that God had indeed forgiven him his sins,—whether he might indeed meetly presume spiritually to " eat the Flesh of Christ and drink His Blood." After this renewed warning and exhortation the priest was to say :

" If any man here . . . doth not trust himself to be reconciled to Almighty God . . . let him yet awhile bewail his sins, and not come to this holy table."

Then, all who were persuaded that they were so "reconciled,"—persuaded by whatever means, be it by priestly absolution or by private prayer and confession and promises made to God alone,—these were desired to make their "humble confession to Almighty God, and to His holy church, here gathered together in His name." The rubric follows :

" Then shall a general confession be made, in the name of all those that are minded to receive the holy communion, either by one of them, or else by one of the ministers, or else by the priest himself."

The confession I do not extract, because it is the same as that which we use at the present day in our liturgy : admirable in its language, and adapted as it seems to me, almost beyond possibility of amendment, to the solemn occasion for which it is prepared.

But I must especially call upon the reader to remember that the term in the rubric "*a general confession,*" was as well understood in that day by all persons, and the intention and the effects of it, as in later times both the term and the effects of such a confession have been first forgotten, then confused, and then misrepresented. I assert that it was impossible in those days for any one to whom the priest spoke, to have conceived that by such "*a general confession*" he could obtain the benefits and the sure blessings of the sacrament of absolution. Even if the language of the warning just going before were not distinct enough, calling on him to consider whether he could "*trust himself to be reconciled to Almighty God,*" that is, in other words, could trust himself to be in a state of grace, yet the known fact that this confession and its succeeding absolution were but the continuance of the ancient practice, could not have allowed even a shadow of a doubt. If it was otherwise, if indeed this "*general confession*" were to be regarded as quite another thing from all that it had been believed to be before, where was he to learn it? who had said so? was it even hinted at, or pretended, or desired, or thought of by any one? if it was, where is the evidence?

I must return here, for an instant to the passage in

the previous notice, which required all who should use auricular confession not to be offended with those who “ shall be satisfied with a general confession.”

Will it be said that here is plain evidence that the church of England has declared that priestly absolution, in its full meaning, can be obtained after and by means of a “ general confession ” only ? What was in truth in those days, a being “ satisfied with a general confession.” Did it signify, could it possibly be understood to signify, any thing except a being “ satisfied ” without priestly absolution ? If this “ general confession ” and its succeeding “ absolution ” had never been heard of by the people before ; if now, for the first time, we found them introduced after such an admonition ; then, I would myself argue that common sense would oblige us to conclude that this general confession and absolution are to be, and were intended to be, taken in place of and equivalent to the old obligatory absolution, after oral and special confession. And I solemnly require the reader to reflect and to remember, whether his opinion and judgement as to the value or efficacy of this general confession and absolution, was adopted and determined on *before* or *since* he knew, as a fact, that this same general confession and absolution are nothing new, but simply retained from the old liturgies, after the example of the practice of many centuries ? The value of the fact is quite another question ; but I am entitled to make this demand of my reader, and to call on him to answer it honestly to himself at least.

I proceed to the absolution. “*Then shall the priest stand up and turning to the people, say thus:*”

“Our blessed Lord, who hath left power to His church to absolve penitent sinners from their sins, and to restore to the grace of the heavenly Father such as truly believe in Christ; Have mercy upon you; pardon and deliver you from all sins; confirm and strengthen you in all goodness; and bring you to everlasting life.”

Because to all intents and purposes the latter part of this absolution is the same now as in 1548, I shall make one or two observations on it here, as it will be useless to repeat it from succeeding Prayer-books.

Now I do earnestly require the reader to compare this form with the old form, as it stood in the ancient liturgies, and already laid before him, in p. 95. Do people argue from the language?—“pardon and deliver you from *all* your sins”? what is such an argument worth? if it is worth anything now, of the same force was it in the year 1547. Are these words stronger, are they fuller, do they seem to be more large in their purpose and consequent effects, than “—dimitat vobis omnia peccata vestra, liberet vos ab omni malo, conservet et confirmet in bono, et ad vitam perducat æternam”? if they are stronger, wherein does the difference consist? what did that form mean in 1547? where is there one single atom, one pretence, of proof, that the same form meant more in 1548?

But the beginning of this absolution did vary both from the old form and from the present. The assertion

of the power which our Blessed Lord left to His church was new, so placed at least, and is now no longer there. I do not conceive it is possible that any person, who claims to be a theologian, will venture to say that this addition, this mere assertion of a fact could, by any stretch of imagination whatever, have so altered the character of the absolution, as to make it that which it was not before: as alone to be sufficient to make it, indeed and in full completeness, something new; that is, an absolution from all sins, mortal and venial; a conveyance of the pardon of the Almighty to the penitent; effective of a change in the sinner's state; in a word, reconciling him to God.

Such an assertion in such a place and at such a time was, however, felt to be uncalled for: and because it was so felt, within a few months, the Common Prayer Book of 1549, (of which this Order of communion was a first step and, so to speak, an instalment) omitted it altogether. Then there was prefixed, before the ancient words, another assertion, perfectly true and most appropriate in the way of comfort and support; another, I say, in the place of a declaration of power and authority and a commission, which in common consistency at least might well be expected to be immediately followed by an actual exercise of that authority and power.

Here, also, I think it well to notice a fact, which, although it may *seem* trivial is not so, but really important in this discussion. Much weight perhaps has been given to, certainly much confusion has been

caused by, the common use of the term “the absolution,” as applied both to the form in the liturgy, and to those in the morning and evening prayer. Now the use of this term sprung originally from the beginnings of the prayers (for such in truth they were, and nothing more,) to which they were applied: “Absolutionem et remissionem” were the first words: and every ritualist knows well how common it has always been to speak of prayers, and collects, and hymns, and antiphons, by their first words, as a mere title.

Thus, by way simply of example: let the reader take the old Salisbury missal. He will find, in Lent, the weeks to be named, “post Invocavit;” “post Reminiscere;” “post Oculi,” and so on: these words having been the commencement of the introits for the sundays. Or, again, the breviary: in that, the dirge was so called because of the first words of the first antiphon, “Dirige Domine;” and the dirge was preceded by another office called “the Placebo,” also from the first words of the antiphon. I repeat that this is a point well deserving the consideration of the reader.

It would be a waste of time, to transcribe the corresponding parts of the liturgy of our Church, since the first Book of 1549 down to the present Book, which relate to confession and absolution. Some changes have been made, all and equally in no way affecting the conclusions to which we shall come. The chief omission is, the advice (first contained in the Order of 1548 and continued in 1549) that no person should find fault

with those who do not use auricular confession : or, these last with others who avail themselves of it.

I shall, therefore, only insist upon the fact that in our present liturgy, as in the first temporary Order of 1548, all persons are desired to "come holy and clean to the heavenly Feast, in the marriage garment required by God in Holy Scripture." They are not told where they are to obtain it *when* they come, but they are to obtain it *before* they come : and "the way and means thereto" are explained as clearly as before. They are (let me repeat it once more) "to come holy and clean ;" to come "in the marriage garment."

And if men cannot satisfy themselves ; if men still doubt and fear and hesitate, because they are not assured in their own consciences,—be they never so repentant, be they never so full of faith, be they never so determined with God's grace to lead a better life,—that they are not after all reconciled to God, then is their case, as from the first ages of the Faith, still provided for. And this ; not by telling them that they can obtain remission of their sins, in the way of priestly absolution, by means of the so called absolution which they must listen to in the Service itself of the eucharist, or, much less, by the so called absolutions of morning and evening prayer, but by another and a more excellent way ; by the true way ; true, because from the beginning, and founded on the word and promises of God.

Let us hear what this is. The priest is to say : "And because it is requisite, that no man should

come to the holy Communion, but with a full trust in God's mercy, and with a quiet conscience ; therefore if there be any of you, who by this means [aforesaid] cannot quiet his own conscience herein, but requireth further comfort or counsel, let him come to me, or to some other discreet and learned minister of God's Word, and open his grief : that by the ministry of God's holy Word he may receive the benefit of absolution, together with ghostly counsel and advice, to the quieting of his conscience, and avoiding of all scruple and doubtfulness."

I shall now consider the absolution which is pre-fixed to our offices for morning and evening prayer.

It is well known that in the first Book of king Edward, matins and evensong began with the Lord's Prayer: there was no so called absolution; nor a confession; nor an exhortation; nor sentences. It is with the "absolution" and confession only that I have now to deal: and it does seem to me that the character which we are to attribute to them both, and to the "absolution" especially as a means of grace, is no less clearly shewn by the omission which we find in the book of 1549, than by the addition which was made in 1552. Whether justly an argument could have been made out against my view of this "absolution," if facts had been exactly the reverse,—if, that is, the *omission* had occurred in the book of 1552,—we need not care to enquire. I regard the fact however, as it stands, to be very significant indeed.

How it was that the revisers of the service-books in

1549 concluded that the old general confession and absolution were not an appropriate commencement of the daily prayers, I do not know: it is possible, that having been attached always to prime and compline, they were naturally (as it were) dropped together with those separate Offices. One thing is undeniable; the year 1549 was not a time when any real means of grace which God has vouchsafed to his Church was either carelessly esteemed, or hastily given up. Not less undeniable is (if I may say so) the amount of value at which in the same year the church of England estimated these forms of general confession and absolution. If such an “absolution” were indeed, or could be, an actual conveyance of remission of sins, the circumstance of its omission,—in other words, the circumstance of its having been taken away in 1549 from the people,—is as inexplicable as it would be indefensible. When we remember, however, the truth of the case, and of what sort that “absolution” is, the circumstance is as clearly explained as it is easily to be defended.

In 1552 the general confession and an “absolution” were again placed before the offices for morning and evening prayer: and they are still retained. They are not in terms like the older forms in the breviary, but certainly the first, if not the second, is similar in its character. Whatever differences there may be, all tend to a greater generality and vagueness than before, rather than to the contrary. But this is not a point worth consideration; and if any one thinks that they

are not more vague, I shall not care to dispute it. At any rate, they will not contradict me who are ready to attribute an especial meaning to the “absolution” in the liturgy, *because* it speaks of a deliverance from “all your sins;” “*Omnia peccata vestra.*”

Now I must reverse the argument which has just above been used. No one will accuse those persons who in 1552 governed the church of England, of any undue partiality to doubtful means of grace, of any leaning towards old erroneous superstitions, of any tendency to invent new channels through which the Divine grace might flow, or any desire to encourage people to rely without most sure and certain proof upon any asserted exercise of the power of the priesthood, and of administration of the sacraments of God. If therefore this “absolution” does indeed convey remission of sins; if it is indeed an exercise of the power of the keys; if by it the priests of the church of England fulfil that commission which has been given to them of binding and loosing; then we shall have to defend the rulers of our Church in 1552, and no less the church of England herself since that time by her acquiescence, from the charge of inventing a new sacrament, and of changing the limits within which, according to the words of scripture and the constant example of the whole Christian world, that power of remitting and of retaining sins has alone been claimed and exercised. And if, as I have said, the determination of the first revisers in 1549 is not to be explained, except upon the fact of the well

known and universally acknowledged light in which general confessions and “absolutions” were regarded, so, in 1552, the conduct of the second reviewers is not one whit less difficult of explanation, except because of the very same well-known acknowledged fact. That fact being so, and I defy any one to disprove it, the decision come to in 1552 is equally with the decision of 1549 to be both explained and defended.

I can scarcely suppose that the reader does not see that if the doctrine of the church with regard to general confessions and absolutions is that which I declare it to be, all other doubts which may be suggested from the meaning of some particular words, whether in the forms themselves or in their rubrics, are of little consequence.

Not that I allow for an instant that there is any force whatever in the argument which Wheatly and others after him have relied on, as to the term “pronounce.” It is always dangerous, and sometimes silly, to attempt to establish reception of great doctrines of the catholic Faith, by means of single words, evidently used accidentally and which *cannot* be conclusive. I say it is sometimes silly; because by trying to prove too much, we run the risk of losing what we can truly and distinctly claim. But having already spoken of this term “pronounce,” it may be now passed by as altogether unworthy further consideration.

Again, another doubt or argument is brought forward on the strength of the alteration made in the rubric, in 1662; previous to that review, the “absolution” was to be said by the *minister alone*; now it

is, *by the priest alone, standing*. Hence it is asserted that this “absolution” must be an actual exercise of the priestly power of remitting and retaining sins, and that it does positively *convey* the grace of such remission to every penitent who has said the previous confession. Now, at least, this brings in something new: the alteration was not made, as every one allows, until 1662; therefore, if it was made in order to prevent deacons from pretending to execute so high an office pertaining solely to priests, the case is clear that in 1552, and from that date downwards, this “absolution” could not possibly have been supposed to be what some now pretend it is, because deacons were allowed to perform this part of the daily prayers. And the direction of *standing* is insisted on: and all this in order to prove, what? not that the church of England in 1662 desired to make more solemn and authoritative this public declaration of the infinite mercies and goodness of God towards those who truly repent, which object may perhaps be well concluded from such alterations of the rubric; but, no less than this: that by the mere change of *minister alone* into *priest alone standing* the church of England in 1662 did that which (if such an argument is good for any thing must prove) the church of England in 1552 did not dare to do; namely, to deny for the first time her whole unbroken chain of doctrine in this matter of Absolution for 500 years, and declare that her people might obtain remission of their sins by means of a general confession and its succeeding absolution.

But they who use these arguments may most justly

be required to decide upon which they will rely: upon both is impossible. If they choose *pronounce* then the other must be given up; because no one pretends that in their meaning of *pronounce* a deacon or any *minister* other than a priest could at any time have said this “absolution;” if they rely on the rubric of 1662 having “priest” they must be content to trouble us no more with fancies about the meaning of “*pronounce*.” So that, after all, instead of two arguments we have but one: and as, at present, it is not easy to guess which of the two will, upon further enquiry, be found the most potent, I shall not waste the patience of the reader by discussing either at hap-hazard.

It is not however to be forgotten that there was one other alteration made, which, as we are disputing about alterations of rubrics, may as well be noticed; because if the changes before this “absolution” prove that it is not a prayer, but a real and absolute *conveyance* of pardon, so the change at the end of it would equally prove that it is not a *conveyance* of pardon, but a prayer. In the former books of 1552, and 1604, it was ordered: “*The people shall answer, Amen.*” But in 1662: “*The people shall answer here, and at the end of all other prayers, Amen.*” I am not at all disposed to attempt to prove much from such an alteration: but it does seem to me to be well worth the attentive regard of those, who are inclined to adopt and to defend new notions about the great ordinances and doctrines of our Faith, upon the strength only of verbal changes and amendments in rubrics.

We come, lastly, to the third form of absolution, namely, the form in our Order for the visitation of the sick.

This Order, with respect to the exhortations immediately preceding the absolution, follows with remarkable exactness the ancient Office of visitation in the old manuals. There are the exhortations to the sick person to be patient, humble, and thankful ; the declaration of the necessity of soundness in the Faith ; the warning to forgive all who have injured him, and to make amends to those whom he has injured ; to take such measures as are fitting for the due settlement of his temporal estate ; and to give, if he has ability, alms liberally to the poor. Then comes the following : and with the exception of the inserted words [of his sins], [be moved to], and [if he humbly and heartily desire it] the present rubric is the same with those of the books of 1604, 1559, and 1552 ; nor, with the like exceptions, so far as concerns the sick person, does it differ from the first book of king Edward in 1549, in any other point than in the words “ after this sort ” instead of “ after this form.”

Our present rubric and Absolution is this : ¶ *Here shall the sick person be moved to make a special confession of his sins, if he feel his conscience troubled with any weighty matter. After which Confession, the Priest shall absolve him (if he humbly and heartily desire it) after this sort :*

Our Lord Jesus Christ, Who hath left power to His Church to absolve all sinners who truly repent and believe in Him, of His great mercy forgive thee thine

offences : And by His authority committed to me, I absolve thee from all thy sins, In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen."

The reader knows what the doctrine of the church of England was in 1548 regarding the sacrament of absolution, and that it required oral confession first as essential always to its due administration and reception. Let him compare this rubric, and this absolution which is to be used now, according to our present ritual, with the corresponding rubrics and absolution in the manual of 1548. Let him, I say, do this : and then prove, if it can be proved, that in any particular *doctrine* regarding this same sacrament of absolution, so far as it relates to eternity, the church of England now holds and teaches any thing contrary to what she held and taught regarding it, with one single exception. That exception is, the *necessity* of priestly absolution to our salvation.

It may be said that the collect which immediately succeeds the absolution negatives the assertion that by the absolution itself the sins of the penitent have been already remitted. This is not an objection which can be urged by any one who believes and insists upon the grace, in some way, of absolution : and, be it remembered that I have all along been arguing with those, and with those only, who do so believe that priestly absolution is a great ordinance and sacrament of God, aiding and helping towards man's salvation. However, be this as it may, if the objection is worth any

thing against the modern doctrine of the church of England, equally valid is it against her doctrine before 1549: in other words; mean what it will, it cannot mean that, after confession, the sins of the penitent are not remitted,—according to the plain promises and commission given by our blessed Lord,—are not, I say, remitted by means of an absolution ministerially, but duly and with power, pronounced by His priest.

This is clear from the ancient ritual. In the year 1548, after the absolution, we find this collect; in like manner following, as it does now. And before I quote it, I cannot help calling the reader's attention to the great harmony, full of comfort and consolation, which exists not only between all the Offices of our Church, in matters of doctrine, when compared one with another, but also with the various parts of each separate Office. Truly indeed, if man may presume to judge, the hand of the Most High has been over us both preventing and assisting. So that, if He will;—if ignorance on the one hand and fanaticism on the other may for a while be checked and overruled, by His good Providence, in this our day of strife—if (I say) He will, I see no reason yet for any fear at all lest the candlestick of the church of England should be removed; I see no reason at all to doubt but that she may remain to the end of the world, even as she has been for nearly two thousand years, a branch of the One Holy Catholic Church of Christ.

I shall now extract the old collect, of which our present one is in many parts a mere translation.

“ *Oratio.* Deus misericors, Deus clemens, qui secundum multitudinem miserationum tuarum peccata pœnitentium deles, et præteritorum criminum culpas venia remissionis evacuas: respice super hunc famulum tuum, sibi remissionem omnium peccatorum suorum, tota cordis contritione, poscentem. Renova in eo, piissime Pater, quicquid diabolica fraude violatum est: et unitati corporis ecclesiæ tuæ membrum infirmum, peccatorum percepta remissione, restitue. Miserere, Domine, gemituum ejus: misere lachrymarum: miserere tribulationum atque dolorum: et non habentem fiduciam nisi in tua misericordia, ad sacramentum reconciliationis admitte. Per Christum Dominum nostrum.”¹

Here then I stop. The reader has now before him the proofs upon which I rest the interpretation which, as it seems to me, not simply *may*, but *must*, be given to the different forms of absolution contained in our Book of common prayer and administration of the sacraments. Let it be clearly understood that upon one argument alone, independent of all others whatsoever, useful and excellent as they may be, whether by way of illustration or of defence, all my assertions are based. It will be for those who dispute with me to prove that it is unsound or dangerous. Or, if they

¹ *Monumenta Ritualia*, vol. 1. p. 82.

consent generally to the argument itself as good, they must shew that I have misapplied it in the present instance.² In either the one case or the other, they must further be prepared to produce and to maintain, in their turn, some other explanation of the doctrine of absolution held by the church of England. It will be very far indeed from sufficient simply to deny ; it will be also necessary for them to affirm. And this, not cloudily and with hesitation, but fully, openly, distinctly, and with proof.

And, here concluding, I shall once more assert both the interpretation and the principle on which the interpretation rests.

First, the principle ; namely, that whatsoever in our Common-prayer book we find handed down from the

² It must carefully in all enquiries, more especially if they are theological, be borne in mind that the truth of any principle on which they are conducted is distinct from the correctness and truth of the application of it. Again, every one can perceive at once, that it does not follow, because the principle which I insist upon may be good, that therefore in respect of all points and subjects to which it is applied, it must bear with equal rigidness, or forbid equally in all any modification whatever. Not to speak of the difference between outward rites or mere ceremonies when compared with essential doctrines of

the Faith,—such, for example, as the doctrines of the Trinity, the Incarnation, Baptism, the Eucharist, Absolution, Confirmation, Orders,—it is evident that these are not equally to be decided and disposed of at once by the application of this rule, but many collateral decisions are to be most carefully weighed, and their results estimated. I need do no more than allude, especially, to the doctrine of the Eucharist.

But honesty and common sense with sufficient learning will be the best judge in all such matters, and to that common sense and honesty I unhesitatingly appeal.

earlier rituals of the church of England, and neither limited nor extended in its meaning by any subsequent canon or article, must be understood to signify (upon the one hand) fully and entirely all, and (on the other hand) no more than it signified before the revision of the ritual.

Hence I conclude that the first “absolution” in the daily office cannot be more than an earnest prayer to God, “to grant us true repentance and His Holy Spirit,” preceded by an authoritative declaration by the priest that the Almighty will pardon sinners being penitent; in other words, an authoritative declaration that those “who truly repent and unfeignedly believe His holy Gospel” may obtain remission of their sins. How they are to obtain it, this declaration does not say: but it must be (I cannot doubt) not only by a true repentance and unfeigned faith, but also by “the way and means” by which men are to endeavour to “come holy and clean,” that is, “in the marriage garment” to the holy Table.

Hence I conclude, secondly, of the “absolution” in the liturgy, that being preceded in like manner by a “general confession” it also is no more now than it ever has been since its introduction into that Service; that is, no more than an earnest prayer offered to the Almighty for pardon and deliverance, for confirmation and strength: and (whatever doubt there may be concerning the first absolution in this respect) that the second absolution may be well believed to convey remission of light and venial sin; more than this it

cannot effect, because of the certain truth, always held and taught by the Church, that oral confession of all deadly sins must, of necessity, precede the reception of the full grace of priestly absolution.

Hence, thirdly, I conclude ; that the essential parts of the great ordinance of absolution being complete, that is to say, if the penitent, whether he be sick or well, shall have made a special confession of his sins ; if, also, he humbly and heartily desire absolution ; if he truly repent and sincerely believe ; then, that the priest, ministerially, by the authority and power committed to him at his ordination, does, using the third Form of Absolution, actually absolve the sinner from his sins, and does in consequence restore him to the state of justification, to the state of favour and grace from which he had fallen.

CHAPTER VII.

AVING thus explained, from her own formularies, what the doctrine is of the church of England upon absolution, it would be absurd for me to pretend to be ignorant of the fact that many writers, some learned and some unlearned, have put forth opinions at variance with the one constant decision of those formularies. Indeed, the extracts which have been made from ritualists quoted at the beginning of this work would alone have been sufficient to shew how remarkable a difference has existed from time to time.

But I am not prepared to attribute any force, as being decisive, to the opinions of any single writer, whoever he may be: we must ask for the reasons of his opinion, before we either submit to it, or, much more, before we can accept it in opposition to the voice of the Church herself. If it be true, and it is true, that an abundance of extracts from all kinds of authors can be produced against the view which I insist upon of the doctrine of absolution, yet, whether singly or all together, they must not be allowed to be heard except as expressions of individual opinion. And let all who

acknowledge absolution to be an ordinance of God consider well, in every instance, how far the judgement of those, to whom in this question they are ready to appeal, may or may not have been influenced and warped by low and heretical views of the grace not only of absolution but of the two great sacraments of baptism and the eucharist : how far, in short, they can be proved to have acknowledged at all, in any true sense, sacramental grace.

However, let this be as it may, if extracts can be produced upon the one side so can they upon the other. I shall now select two or three : not with the desire of adding weight to that which I hold to be complete already, namely, to the clear decisions of the Church ; but with the intention of satisfying some who may attribute greater importance than is due to such sort of evidence ; and, more especially, for the grave consideration of those who will be eager to bring forward statements, from other writers, of a totally different kind. It is no business of mine to attempt to reconcile parties who are contrariant : I am content to know that the authors from whom I quote, are, in these quotations at least, in harmony with the teaching of the church of England. It will be seen that the succeeding extracts support chiefly the view which we ought to take of the third form, in the visitation office. But if upon the one hand it may be said that they do explain that only, yet on the other hand, if the grace of absolution of mortal or deadly sins were really *conveyed* also by the “absolutions” which are given after

general confessions, it is strange that no trace of that notion is to be found, or any allusion whatsoever made to them, in portions of books which expressly relate to the subject of absolution.

Nor is it to be overlooked that there is a difficulty in referring to the works of theologians shortly after the reformation, whether we appeal to them in support of or against previous confession in order to the full grace of sacerdotal absolution : namely, it is a point which scarcely seems to have come before them. It would be begging the question, I suppose, for me to say that they always took it for granted : but it is not easy to suggest any other cause for the omission. When particulars of the doctrine of absolution were to be affirmed or denied, they dwelt upon and argued sometimes the necessity of it for the remission of mortal sin after baptism ; sometimes the effects of it ; sometimes the meaning of the term ; sometimes the claim of the church to convey it, in the same sense as at the beginning, since the days of the apostles.

Yet, before we proceed to individual writers, let me mention that it is a significant thing that in the requisitions which were more than once presented to convocation during queen Mary's reign, to restore doctrine and discipline as before king Edward's time, there is scarcely any reference to the doctrine of absolution. The only notice that I remember is to the effect that confession be again made, as it had been, obligatory. Much less is there complaint that people had been of late years taught that the blessings and grace of sacer-

dotal absolution were to be obtained after the public repetition of general confessions. The order to confess once a year was again insisted on, and this was all: as, for example, in the following among the articles of visitation for the diocese of London in 1554, which I quote chiefly because of the term “benefit of absolution.” It is not unimportant, as an illustration of the same words which from 1552 until now have been continued in our Prayer-book. “*Article xx. Item.* Whether they and every of them have diligently moved and exhorted their parishioners . . . reverently and devoutly to receive and use the sacraments, especially the sacrament of the altar, or to be confessed and receive at the priest’s hand the benefit of absolution, according to the laudable customs of this realm?”¹

In 1559 a declaration of certain principal articles of religion was set out by the archbishops and bishops, to be read by all parsons and curates, immediately after the gospel, on two sundays in the year. This was to produce uniformity of doctrine, and the people were to be required to assent to the same. Of these articles, the 3rd was: “I do acknowledge also that church to be the spouse of Christ, wherein the word of God is truly taught, the sacraments orderly ministered according to Christ’s institution, and the authority of the keys duly used.”² There can be no more doubt

¹ Wilkins *Concil.* tom. 4. p. 141. Foxe. *Acts and Monuments.* 106, cf. *Documentary Annals.* i. vol. 3. p. 37. ² *Ibid.* p. 195.

about what is here meant by “the authority of the keys,” than that by “the sacraments” were intended those which are generally necessary to salvation, baptism and the supper of the Lord.

There is a curious *item* in one of the lists of requests presented by some members of the lower house of convocation in 1562, which, whatever else may be thought of it, does appear to me to have been simply impossible to have been proposed, if the “general confession” had been believed in those days to be in order to the grace of sacerdotal absolution. “v. That it may be added to the confession which is used to be made before the ministration of the holy communion, that the communicants do detest and renounce the idolatrous mass.” I may add, by the way, that among other things demanded at the same time were, that the sign of the cross might be left off in baptism:—that in the time of ministering the communion, kneeling may be left indifferent to the discretion of the ordinary:—that the use of copes and surplices may be taken away:—that in the 33rd article of doctrine concerning ceremonies, these words may be mitigated: “*Is, ut qui peccat in publicum ordinem ecclesiæ, quique lædit auctoritatem magistratus, et qui infirmorum fratrum conscientias vulnerat, publica, ut cæteri timeant, arguendus est*” :— that all saints, feasts, and holy-days, bearing the name of a creature, may be clearly abrogated, *etc.* To find the name of one so notorious as Sampson, dean of Christ Church, subscribed to this paper, is only what one would have expected: how

are we to account for that name being immediately preceded by “ Nowell, dean of St. Paul’s, proloc.”?³

But to return. There is one more evidence of the same kind occurring in the articles to be enquired of in the metropolitical visitation of the cathedral and collegiate churches by archbishop Parker in 1567. “ vj. *Item.* You shall enquire of the doctrine and judgement of all and singular hedd and members of your church: . . . whether any of them do either privilie or openlie preach or teach any unwholesome, erroneous, seditious doctrine, . . . or in any other point do perswade or move any not to conform themselves to the order of religion reformed, restored, and received by public authority in this church of England. As for example, . . . that every article in our crede, commonly received and used in the church, is not to be received of necessity; or that mortal or voluntary sins committed after baptisme, be not remissible by penance; etc.”⁴

We will now turn to the works of some writers in our Church, to whom I have alluded.

First, archbishop Cranmer: “ Now, when a man after baptism hath greuously synned, and doubteth in his conscience, whether he be in the favour of God or no (as oftentimes yt happeneth) then it is harde for hym to trust to his awn bare imaginations . . . But [God] hath giuen the kayes of the kingdom of heauen, and the authoritic to forgyue synne, to the ministers

³ *Ibid.* p. 239.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 253.

of the churche. Wherefore let him that is a sinner, go to one of them, let him knowledge and confesse his synne, and praye him, that according to God's commaundemente, he wyll gyue him absolution and comfort him with the worde of grace and forgyuenes of his synnes. And when the minister dothe so, then I ought stedfastly to beleue, that my synnes are truly forgyuen me in heauen . . . Wherefore, good children, gyue good eare to this doctrine, and when your synnes do make you afrayed and sadde, then seke and desyer absolution and forgyuenes of your synnes of the ministers, whiche haue receaued a commission and commaundement from Christ hymselfe, to forgiue men their synnes, and then your consciences shal haue peace, tranquillitie and quietnes.”⁵

Of course, it will be at once objected against this passage, that it is not archbishop Cranmer's writing: and, in strictness, this objection is true: because, although Burnet and some others do not appear to have been aware of it, there is no doubt that the catechism is a translation from the Latin or German of Justus Jonas. But the archbishop fully adopted it: and it has been said, (nor do I know of any evidence to the contrary) that he professed to the very last to “adhere to the statements therein made, and repudiated the idea of his having deviated from the doctrine therin propounded.”⁶ It is certain that it was put

⁵ Catechism. *p. 202. Edit. 1829.*

⁶ Notes to a visitation sermon by Dr. Hook. 1839. *p. 98.*

forth by him, and intended to be of authority: and in his own work, “The Defence, &c.” published in 1550, the archbishop refers to “a catechisme by me set furth.” Again, in his answer to Smith, he says: “not long before *I wrot* the sayd catechisme.”⁷

Next, the homilies. These say, most truly, of absolution, that “it is no such sacrament as baptism and the communion are.” But it declares, as truly, that it “hath the promise of forgiveness of sin.”⁸ It is impossible to extract from the homily of repentance: but let those who insist that remission of sins is given, and that the power of sacerdotal absolution is exercised, by the “absolutions” succeeding the general confessions in the daily offices and liturgy, carefully examine it and see whether in any way such an opinion is there supported. It explains and enforces sufficiently well the great truth, that absolution, in its highest sense—an absolution, such as has just been spoken of, “a sacrament, having the promise of forgiveness of sin,”—is not of necessity to salvation. But that, on the contrary, we may hope and fully trust that God will forgive our sins upon repentance which shall be made up of four parts; that is; of contrition; of confession to God; of faith; and of purpose of amendment of life.

I proceed, however, to the next century. Bishop Montagu asserts: “It is confessed that all priests, and

⁷ Editor’s preface to the Catechism. p. iv.

⁸ Homily of common prayer and sacraments.

none but priests, have power to forgiue sinnes: it is confessed, that private confession vnto a priest, is of very ancient practice in the Church: of excellent vse and practice, being discreetly handled. We refuse it to none, if men require it, if neede be to haue it. We urge it and perswade it in extreames: Wee require it in case of perplexitie, for the quieting of men disturbed, and their consciences. It hath been so acknowledged by your fellowes," the bishop is arguing against a Romanist, "that in the visitation of the sicke, it is required: . . . and likewise before the receiving of the Lord's Supper."⁹

⁹ The Gagge. p. 83.

Bishop Montagu continues: "Which doctrine and injunction, our bishops doe, or should enquire in their visitations, touching the vse and neglect of this so good an order: as did that right learned and reverend bishop of Norwich, Dr. Overal, of late: a man for admirable learning, and yet of strange humility, in communicating his knowledge vnto any poore scholler, hardly equalled, sure outgone by none since the world had him. The 21 Article enquired of in his visitation 1619, concerning ministers, is: Whether doth your minister before the séveral times of the administration of the Lord's supper, admonish and exhort his parishioners, if they have their consciences troubled

and disquieted, to resort vnto him, or some other learned minister, and open his grieve, that hee may receive such ghostly counsell and comfort, as his conscience may be relieved, and by the minister he may receive the benefit of absolution, to the quiet of his conscience, and auoiding of scruple. And if any man confesse his secret and hidden sinnes, be he sicke, or whole, to the minister, for the vnburthening of his conscience, and receyuing such spirituall consolation, doth or hath the said minister at any time, reuealed and made known to any person whomsoever, any crime or offence so committed to his trust, contrary to the 113 canon?"

Such enquiries in those days were not unfrequent in Articles

I must make another extract from the same writer, which is especially important in its bearing upon the argument which Wheatly rests upon the term pronounce: and which proves that in the seventeenth century a distinction was clearly observed between “pronouncing” and “giving” remission of sins. “In some sense,” says the bishop, “it is not true, that *none but God can forgive sinnes or retaine them*. For by delegation others also might doe it ministerially. God doth forgive them by the ministery of men. The priest, to doe this, hath power conferred upon him by God in as ample sort as he or any man can receive it. And that this was indeed the doctrine of our Church, I proved by the witnesse of an enemy and therefore the stronger; producing the verdict of a papist, who confesseth, that priests have power not only to pronounce, but to give remission of sinnes, which seemeth to bee the doctrine of the communion booke in the

of visitation. Thus, “Doth your minister . . . commonly premonish his parishioners, if they be troubled in conscience, to confess and open their griefs to him, that they may receive the benefit of absolution.” *Diocese of Peterborough.* 1636. And in almost the same words, *within the Diocese of Norwich*, 1636. Again, of bishop Montagu himself in 1638, very important in its bearing on confession as an essential requisite beforehand. “Doth the minister

comfort the sick person, as concerning his soul’s health, his state to God-ward? Doth he, upon hearing of his confession, which he shall persuade him to make, absolve him from his sins? and hath he at any time discovered any part of his confession?” Once more; “Doth the minister visit the sick? Doth he, upon their confession, repentance and faith, (being thereunto desired) absolve them?” *Diocese of Ely.* 1686.

visitation of the sick I relate what one of that side saith: I say it not myselfe, but only recognize the truth of his relation, which I could not deny. For in the visitation of the sick, the doctrine and the practice is as hee relateth it The bishop of Meath [archbishop Usher] was of the same opinion, *pag. 109*, against a *Jesuites challenge*; ‘ He hath done us open wrong in charging us to deny, that priests have power to forgive sins.’ And hee giveth a reason irrefragable; ‘Whereas the very formall words which our Church requireth to be used in the ordination of a minister, are these: Whose sinnes thou dost forgive, etc.’ The execution of which authority accordingly is put in practice,—let it be observed, not in the daily office or in the liturgy, but,—“in the visitation of the sick.”¹⁰

About the same time also, bishop Cosin, in the introduction to his well known book of private devotions, thus declares the 5th of the *Precepts of the Church*. “5. To receive the blessed sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ with frequent devotion . . . And for better preparation thereunto, as occasion is, to disburthen and quiet our consciences of those sins that may grieve us, or scruples that may trouble us, to a learned and discreet priest, and from him to receive advice and the benefit of absolution.”

Again, bishop Morton: some few years before: and here, once more, let the reader observe the distinction

¹⁰ Appello Cæsarem, *p. 312.*

between the *proclamation* of pardon in the public service, and the application of pardon by the *office of the minister*. “The power of absolution, whether it be general or particular, whether in publike or in private, it is professed in our Church : where both in her publike service is proclaimed pardon and absolution upon all penitents, and a private applying of absolution unto particular penitents by the office of the minister ; and greater power than this no man hath received from God.” And he had before declared concerning his adversaries of the church of Rome : “ It is not questioned between us (as their owne cardinall witnesseth) whether it be convenient for a man burthened with sinne, to lay open his conscience in private, vnto the minister of God, and to seeke at his hands both the counsell of instruction, and the comforts of God’s pardon : but whether there be (as from Christ’s institution) *such an absolute necessitie of this private confession*, as that without it there can be no remission or pardon hoped for from God.”¹¹

Contemporary with Morton, was Dr. Crackanthorp : he declares, against the archbishop of Spalato ; “ de abrogata quoque apud nos auriculari confessione, veteratorie vafreque agis. Confessionem privatam, quò in sinum, et si vis, in aurem presbyteri, angorem quis animi sui pro perpetratis uno pluribusque peccatis exonerat, etiam peccatoris talis post seriam, et non fucatam pœnitentiam ab eo factam, absolutionem per

¹¹ Catholike Appeale. p. 270. 253.

ecclesiæ claves presbyteris omnibus commissas, et probat et docet ecclesia nostra.”¹²

Another, of the same time, was bishop White; in his answer to the Jesuit Fisher, he acknowledges private confession and particular absolution to be “profitable helps of virtue, godliness, and spiritual comfort.” But I chiefly quote him now, on account of his adoption of and consent to a remarkable statement in the Augsburg confession, which, so far as that adoption by him is concerned, seems to be conclusive. “The Augustane confession,” says bishop White, “speaketh in this manner: ‘We retaine confession, especially because of absolution, which is God’s word, applied to euerie priuate person; therefore it were an ungodly thing to remooue priuate absolution out of the Church; neither do they duly consider, what is remission of sinnes, or the force of the keyes of the kingdom of heauen, which contemne or repudiate priuate absolution.’”¹³ He goes on to explain the difference between the doctrines of Rome and England on the question of confession: that whereas the one holds private confession of all known mortal sin to be “simply necessary” for the obtaining remission of sins after baptism, “our tenet is, that auricular confession is not absolutely necessarie to remission, . . . and the rigorous urging thereof not orthodoxall or catholike faith: neither is penance a sacrament of the

¹² Defensio eccl. anglic. *cap.* lxxx. § 6.

¹³ Answer to Fisher, *p.* 186

new testament, like vnto baptisme, and the holy eucharist." I am justly bound to refer the reader to the remainder of this same chapter of the Answer, because the author, in not very intelligible language, appears to argue also that the priests execute their office of forgiving sins "judicallie" and "declaratively," by "publishing God's judicall act, and by applying the word and sacraments to penitent persons." How far administration of the two chief sacraments can be truly said to be an exercise of the power of absolution, is, in reality, altogether another question: and it is a confusion of argument to mix it up with that which is indeed the matter in dispute. However, I notice it, and (as I have said) would desire the reader to examine the rest of the chapter; or, otherwise, it may be thought that I have quoted as an authority on my part, one who is rather an authority against me. I take the opportunity also of again repeating, that all objections which are grounded upon assertions, that the priestly office of absolution is to be referred merely to administration of the sacraments of baptism and the eucharist, not only cannot be urged by any who will have it that absolution is *conveyed* by the forms after "a general confession," but they must moreover be contended against by such parties, no less than by myself.

Among the sermons of Dr. Donne, upon the penitential psalms, is one on ps. xxxij. 5. The whole sermon is well worth serious perusal. He argues, and very forcibly; that our sins must be, in particular, confessed to the Almighty, and that, after such con-

fession, He will pardon them. Now I say, it is an unaccountable thing, if, in Dr. Donne's day, so large an effect as some now attribute to the public absolutions was indeed the doctrine of the Church, that he should have totally omitted all reference to such a mode and means of pardon of sin. Nor is this all; Dr. Donne does speak somewhat of another confession than that which, of necessity, we must make to God Himself; and of a priestly absolution. Let us hear him. "*Confitebor Domino*, says David, *I will confess my sins to the Lord*: sins are not confessed, if they be not confessed to Him; and if they be confessed to Him, in case of necessity it will suffice, though they be confessed to no other. Indeed, a confession is directed upon God, though it be made to His minister: if God had appointed His angels, or His saints to absolve me, as He hath His ministers, I would confess to them . . . Men come not willingly to this manifestation of themselves; nor are they to be brought in chains, as they do in the Roman church, by a necessity of an exact enumeration of all their sins; but to be led with that sweetness, with which our Church proceeds, in appointing sick persons, if they feel their consciences troubled with any weighty matter, to make a special confession, and to receive absolution at the hands of the priest; and then to be remembered, that every coming to the communion, is as serious a thing as our transmigration out of this world, and we should do as much here, for the settling of our conscience, as upon our death-bed . . . If I submit a cause to the arbiter-

ment of any man, to end it, *secundum voluntatem*, says the law, How he will, yet still *arbitrium est arbitrium boni viri*, His will must be regulated by the rules of common honesty, and general equity. So when we lead men to this holy ease of discharging their heavy spirits, by such private confessions, yet this is still limited by the law of God, so far as God hath instituted this power by His gospel, in His church, and far from inducing amongst us that torture of the conscience, that usurpation of God's power, that spying into the counsel of princes, with which the church of Rome hath been deeply charged." Let this admirable extract be well considered : whether it may seem to all so excellent as it appears to me, I know not. But this will hardly be denied ; it could not have been written by a man who had heard of and was a supporter of the opinion that priestly absolution is by the church of England held to follow upon a public and general confession.¹⁴

Next, bishop Jeremy Taylor. "Besides this examination of your conscience, (which may be done in secret, between God and your own soul) there is great use of holy confession ; which, though it be not generally in all cases, and peremptorily commanded, as if without it no salvation could possibly be had ; yet you are advised by the Church, under whose discipline you live, that before you are to receive the holy sacrament, or when you are visited

¹⁴ Sermon lvi. vol. 2. p. 563.

with any dangerous sickness, if you find any one particular sin or more, that lies heavy upon you, to disburthen yourself of it into the bosom of your confessor, who not only stands between God and you, to pray for you; but hath the power of the keys committed to him, upon your true repentance to absolve you in Christ's name, from those sins which you have confessed to him. II. You are to remember that you are to bring along with you to confession, sorrow for sins past, and settled resolutions for the time to come. For without this, confession is but a mere pageant; and rather a mockery of God, than any *effectual means* to reconcile you to him. III. That having made choice of a confessor . . . you are advised plainly and sincerely to open your heart to him; and . . . to look upon him only as he is a trustee from God, and commissioned by Him as His ministerial deputy, to hear, and judge, and absolve you.”¹⁵

Again, Dr. Hammond. In his annotations on S. James, ch. v. 15. he declares the absolution of which the holy apostle speaks to be “of two sorts; first, a release from publick censures: secondly, more private in case of any wasting sin more privately committed, and in confession revealed to the spiritual person; in which case, . . . the elder may and ought to give the sick person the peace of the Church, and the benefit of absolution.” And, upon the next verse, the same learned writer contends “that the *ἀλλήλοις*, one to

¹⁵ Guide to the penitent. p. 105. edit. 1735.

another, must be restrained only to the elders fore-mentioned (as *πάντες ἀλλήλοις ὑποτασσόμενοι*, 1 Pet. v. 5., must signify, as it is defined by the matter, subjection which is not mutual, nor of superiors to inferiors, nor of equals to equals, but only of inferiors to superiors) and the confessing of sins to them be here prescribed as the preparative and condition of their absolution.”¹⁶

Dr. Hammond wrote also a treatise upon *the power of the keys, or binding and loosing*. This is chiefly concerned with his first division of absolution, as explained by himself, just above: still he speaks somewhat at last of private application of this ordinance. I shall not enquire here or dispute whether Dr. Hammond’s account of the effects of sacerdotal absolution *in foro pænitentiae* be or be not adequate to the full teaching of the church of England: it scarcely to me appears to be so: nevertheless he declares that the effect of such an absolution is “a sealing to the penitent a right of God’s promise of forgiveness in heaven, as it were solemnly, and in the court.” But for my present point he is sufficiently clear: plainly declaring the necessity of a previous confession. He first cites the exhortation in the communion service, beginning, *Because it is requisite*, etc. and thus proceeds. “All which being an exhortation of the church belonging to a particular case, as they do imply that those foresaid means may happily serve the turn, *without opening his case to the minister and consequently without*

¹⁶ Works. vol. 3. p. 786.

receiving absolution, so are they a fervent exhortation to all, in case those means prove not successful, to seek out and make use of those auxiliaries.” And presently after he takes for granted that before the minister can absolve he must have “a survey of the soul; cognizance of the offence first and then of the repentance.”¹⁷

And, once more, archbishop Wake: “The church of England refuses no sort of confession either public or private, which may be any way necessary to the quieting of men’s consciences; or to the exercising of that *power of binding and loosing*, which our Saviour Christ has left to His Church. We have our penitential canons for publick offenders; we exhort men, if they have any the least doubt or scruple, nay sometimes though they have none, but especially before they receive the holy sacrament, to confess their sins. We propose to them the benefit not only of ghostly advice how to manage their repentance, but the great comfort of *absolution* too, as soon as they shall have compleated it. . . When we visit our sick, we never fail to exhort them to make a special confession of their sins to him that ministers to them: and when they have done it, the absolution is so full, that the church of Rome itself could not desire to add anything to it.”¹⁸

Many other passages to the same effect from very

¹⁷ Ibid. vol. 1. p. 256.

¹⁸ An exposition of the doctrine

of the Church of England. Gibson’s Preservative, vol. 3. p. 31.

learned writers in our Church, might be easily added to the above: but, without an adequate object, it would serve only to weary. I shall allude to one more, Thorndike, who, at the end of a long dissertation on the subject of absolution, does not hesitate to say, that, "setting aside those gross abuses, which may follow upon the perswasion, that those penalties which are to be imposed by the power of the keyes, to produce that disposition which qualifieth penitents for remission of sinnes, tend onely to satisfie for the temporall penalty, remaining due when the sin is pardoned; and setting aside those abuses in the practice of penance which tend to introduce this perswasion: I must freely glorifie God, by freely professing, that, in my judgement, no Christian kingdom or state can maintain itself to be that which it pretendeth, more effectually, than by giving force and effect to the law of private confession once a year, by such means, as may seem both requisite and effectuall to inforce it."¹⁹

Thorndike was a very learned and grave writer; one whose opinion ought heedfully to be listened to and not hastily rejected. Such a passage as that just quoted from his great work, could not (I argue as before of Dr. Donne) possibly have been written by any one who thought that a general public confession was alone required before reception, or administration, of the grace of priestly absolution. This is all that, in fact, concerns my present matter. But it is not all

¹⁹ Epilogue, *book*, 3. p. 104.

that I think it well to say. Having placed here, for any purpose whatever, such an opinion, I cannot allow it to be doubtful whether I consent to it or not. Let me, then, distinctly say, that not only, to the best of my judgement, was the church of England fully justified in removing utterly the necessity of oral confession, but that I cannot conceive any combination of circumstances which would warrant as a matter of discipline,—for more than discipline it cannot be,—a return to a rule so unscriptural in itself, and dangerous in its results. Our Blessed Lord left the power of absolution to His priests, to be sought for or not by His people, being penitent, at their discretion. Can it then be otherwise than wrong to abridge a liberty which was granted from the beginning, and allowed in the whole Church for more than one thousand years? And, by consequence, to change a high spiritual privilege and sure means of grace when duly and voluntarily used, into a sacrament like baptism or the eucharist, necessary to salvation?

Before I quoted these extracts from the works of individual divines of our Church, I gave one or two authorities of a higher character; it would not be ill to offer two of a similar kind by way of conclusion. Let it be remembered that these also are for illustration only, not strictly for proof.

The 19th of the canons of Dublin in 1634 ordered, that “people are often to be exhorted to enter into a special examination of the state of their own souls; and that finding themselves either extreme dull, or

much troubled in mind, they do resort unto God's ministers, to receive from them as well advice and counsel for the quickening of their dead hearts, as the benefit of absolution likewise for the quieting of their consciences, by the power of the keys which Christ hath committed to His ministers for that purpose.”²⁰ Is there not here (to mention nothing else) an evident opposition of “extreme dullness” and “trouble of mind and an unquiet conscience?” advice and counsel being provided for the one, and absolution for the other?

Secondly: the declaration which was published in 1696, “by the archbishops and bishops, in and about London, concerning the irregular proceedings of certain clergymen at the execution of Sir John Friend and Sir William Parkins.” This was the celebrated case in which Collier was concerned. But, to my present object, the declaration is important, on account of the following paragraph. “Lastly, for those clergymen the rubric in our office of the visitation of the sick, from whence [in absolution] they took the words they then used, and upon which, if upon any thing in our liturgy, they must ground this their proceeding, gave them no authority nor no pretence for the absolving these persons; nay, as they managed the affair, they acted in this absolution far otherwise, than is there directed. That rubric is concerning sick persons, and it is there required, first, that the

²⁰ Wilkins. *Concil. tom. 4.* p. 501.

sick person shall be moved to make a special confession of his sins, if he feel his conscience troubled with any weighty matter, and then after such confession, the priest shall absolve him, if he humbly and heartily desire it. But here they absolved persons, without so much as once moving them at that time to make a special confession of their sins, at least of those sins for which they were condemned.”²¹ I do not care to argue whether the clergymen were or were not authorized to give these criminals absolution; nor, whether their conduct in that business was becoming; nor, whether it would have been sufficient for the penitents to have confessed “at least” those sins for which they were about to suffer; nor, whether the bishops in their declaration were prejudiced by political opinions and feelings of the time: but this I do say; that the bishops take for granted that confession by the penitent ought to have gone before any exercise, or any attempt to exercise, the power of absolution. Nor is the above sentence, all; it goes on thus: “If these ministers knew not the state of those men’s souls, before they gave them absolution, as it is manifest two of them did not; how could they without manifest transgression of the church’s order, as well as the profane abuse of the power Christ has left with His ministers, absolve them from all their sins?”

²¹ *Ibid. p. 627.*

CHAPTER VIII.

HAVING now adduced, whatever their weight may be, these authorities in support of the interpretation which, according to the expression of her own voice, we ought to give to the three forms so-called of absolution contained in the Common Prayer Book of the church of England, I would desire to throw together some observations upon the whole matter. I cannot pretend to offer these as, in any way, more than mere suggestions for the consideration of the reader : and the time which is allowed me, reasonably, to publish the present work, will not permit an attempt at any formal, much less, complete dissertation upon the many, and most important, particulars involved in an enquiry into the ordinance of absolution.

And, at once, in this place I must say that it is no part of my duty now to defend the truth which our Church insists upon, namely, that priestly absolution is not necessary to salvation ; and, therefore, that oral confession is not obligatory upon all her members. It must be enough for me to declare my entire and unhesitating acceptance of this, her decision : nor that

alone ; I would express also, with all humility, my deep conviction that the removal of the old rule, and the return to ancient practice in this respect, was one great and chief blessing of the reformation.

Quite in accordance therefore with holy Scripture and with catholic tradition is the statement that God “pardoneth and absolveth all them that truly repent, and unfeignedly believe His holy Gospel.” Excellent is the admonition which succeeds the pronunciation of this statement ; “ Let us beseech Him to grant us true repentance, and His Holy Spirit, that those things may please Him, which we do at this present : and that the rest of our life hereafter may be pure, and holy.” Most true do I believe it to be, that if returning sinners would once again be accepted of God, would once again “ come” before Him “ holy and clean,” they may with all confidence rely upon “ the way and means thereto,”—alone and without other means,—which our Church has set before them : that is ; “ To examine their lives and conversations by the rule of God’s commandments ; and whereinsoever they shall perceive themselves to have offended, either by will, word, or deed, there to bewail their own sinfulness, and to confess themselves to Almighty God, with full purpose of amendment of life.”

And, once more ; fully do I accept, and, with God’s help, most plainly would I always endeavour to urge and to insist upon, this truth also ; that, without any resort at all to priestly absolution, without receiving it, without desiring it, “ if we have sinned, we have

an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. If, therefore, we return to Him, Who is the merciful receiver of all true penitent sinners, we may assure ourselves that He is ready to receive us, and most willing to pardon us, if we come unto Him with faithful repentance; if we submit ourselves unto Him, and from henceforth walk in His ways: if we will take His easy yoke, to follow Him in lowliness, patience, and charity, and be ordered by the governance of His Holy Spirit: seeking always His glory, and serving Him duly in our vocation with thanksgiving. This if we do, Christ will deliver us from the curse of the law, and He will set us on His right hand, and give us the gracious benediction of His Father, commanding us to take possession of His glorious kingdom." These are, indeed, golden words: these are words, I humbly and heartily believe, founded to their full extent and in their obvious and honest meaning upon the Word of God itself, and the primitive teaching of the Church.

Yet, whilst I say that to defend these great Christian truths is no part of my duty now, let me, nevertheless, make one or two brief remarks.

Consider then, that the very texts themselves by which we prove the grace of absolution, and the commission to absolve which our Lord gave to the ministers of His Church, prove no less, when compared with other texts relating to the two great sacraments, that absolution is not necessary to salvation. Power to baptize, power to consecrate the holy eucharist, power

to remit and to retain sins, were all and equally given to the apostles, and in them to whomsoever in like manner they, by the guidance of His Holy Spirit, should deliver the same powers. And the effects of all have been equally declared by the mouth of the Divine Saviour. But although it is said of absolution, “Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained;” where is it said of absolution, as it is said of baptism, “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God”? or, as it is said of the blessed eucharist, not only, “whoso eateth My Flesh, and drinketh My Blood, hath eternal life,” but also, “Except ye eat the Flesh of the Son of man, and drink His Blood, ye have no life in you.” These are texts by which we accept the statement of our Church that baptism and the Lord’s supper are “generally necessary to salvation:” these are texts which,—however large and many the blessings of sacerdotal remission of sins may be, however sure the promises upon which those blessings depend, however great, in a word, “the benefit of absolution” may be,—these, I say, are texts which remove into a class, not to be approached by any other ordinance or sacrament whatsoever, the sacraments of Holy Baptism and the Supper of the Lord.

I should hesitate in admitting arguments to be conclusive against the necessity of sacerdotal absolution which are obtained from the books of the old Testa-

ment: such, for example, as that in Ezechiel; “When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive.”¹ Or, in Isaiah; “Thus saith the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, in returning and rest shall ye be saved;” or, in the same prophet; “Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before Mine eyes, cease to do evil, learn to do well, . . . though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow, though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”² Or, once more, in the Psalter; “I said, I will confess my sins unto the Lord; and so Thou forgavest the wickedness of my sin.”³ For it may truly be answered, our Blessed Lord was yet to come, and to declare how far these promises of free forgiveness of sins were to be limited by the commands and institutions of His Gospel. Limited to some extent, undeniably, they have been, by the necessity of the sacraments of baptism and the eucharist.

And, in like manner, all arguments must be very accurately weighed which are brought against the necessity of absolution, from texts in the new Testament, which turn upon the true interpretation which we are, in each separate instance, to give to the terms *μετανοεῖν*, and *pænitentiam agere*, and *repent*. Such, for example, as the admonitions in the Apocalypse to the

¹ ch. xvij. v. 27.

² ch. xxx. v. 15. ch. i. v. 18.

³ Ps. xxxij. v. 6.

churches of Ephesus and Sardis and Laodicea. These references to Scripture do not alone decide the question in dispute either way.

But, whilst these texts are not by themselves to be received as conclusive, I do hold them, altogether, to be very significant, and, to me at least, an argument which receiving elsewhere further confirmation, will not permit an answer short of a distinct assertion that sins after baptism cannot be forgiven by means of sincere repentance, as it is commonly understood ; that is, without sacerdotal absolution. Because though single texts, they do not stand alone. If it is true, and it is true, that “repentance” under the old Law, was mercifully accepted before God in order to remission of sins, we require some proof, irresistible if we may say so, that so great a door of mercy was to be shut in future against those who should be members of the Church of Christ. All the proofs and evidences which we bring in support of the sure remission of sins by absolution when duly sought for and rightly received, will not convince us that it is moreover true, that sins after baptism cannot be forgiven *except* by absolution. It must not only be shewn that absolution is an ordinance of God, a means of grace offered ; but that it is of necessity to be resorted to and used by all who will be saved. And I do not know where we are to find the evidence of such a doctrine in Holy Scripture, or how we are to prove it thereby, so that it shall “be required of any man that it should be believed as an article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation.”

And, as it is certain that no where in the gospels, the acts, or in the epistles of S. Paul or the other apostles, is there any declaration that absolution is necessary for the remission of sins, so moreover there are places which help very strongly to sustain the contrary and true doctrine. For example, the parable of the prodigal son : the answer of S. Peter to Simon Magus, “ Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee : ” and the admonition to the Corinthians : “ Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup.”⁴

To say that, as to this last text, the words “examine himself” *must* mean an examination before a priest by oral confession in order to absolution, seems to me to be nothing less than begging the question. If S. Paul had intended that, it is natural to suppose that he would have said so ; or at least would not have spoken of a man’s *examining himself* as the *necessary*, and therefore in strictness the *sufficient* preparation for a worthy receiving of the holy communion. It is replied that an examination of conscience cannot be made except by those means which Christ has Himself appointed : and therefore that no one can worthily par-

⁴ The council of Durham, in 1223, interpolated this text. “ Qui manducaverit carnem Domini et biberit sanguinem ejus indigne, reus erit corporis et sanguinis Domini : terrere nos potest terribilis hæc sententia. Propter hoc

audite, filii carissimi, consilium apostoli, quod tale est : probet autem semetipsum homo unusquisque per confessionem mundans et sanctificans, et sic de pane illo edat, et de calice bibat.” *Wilkins. Concilia. tom. i. p. 579.*

take without having before made use of those means ; namely, of absolution. But, we still ask, where is the certain evidence of this appointment, so that sin cannot be forgiven without such absolution ? and, until it can be produced, the declaration of S. Paul requires neither to be explained nor to be explained away, but remains to be still taken in its obvious intention ; that is, as a distinct positive assertion that, if men will, they may prepare themselves, they may examine themselves, and so go worthily and with a sure trust to God's holy Table.

But whilst I would, by these and such arguments, endeavour to confirm the decision of our Church that sacerdotal absolution is not necessary to the forgiveness of deadly sins, and that God will of His great mercy pardon true penitents upon their own secret sorrow and confession and resolutions made to Him alone, yet we must no less contend for and support the truth, that God has also left to His Church the power of remitting and of retaining sins. A power which by the Church has been committed to those who are priests, only to be used after oral confession made to them in order to absolution. This is a means of grace which in its effects, when used, is not second even to the grace of the holy eucharist itself ; for what effects can be greater than pardon and remission of sins ? what effects can exceed those which reinstate the guilty in the full favour of Almighty God ? But it is a means which must voluntarily be sought for, and most heedfully be exercised.

I know no reasonable answer which can be given to the scripture which is usually brought to prove that oral confession must precede sacerdotal absolution. The fact that the church of England now holds this doctrine as she always has so held, in strict accordance, to the best of my belief, with the constant teaching of the whole catholic Church, up to the apostolic age, would in itself serve to convince us. If men contradict the historical evidence of this fact, it is not enough that that contradiction should be merely negative. We justly demand some proof that the Church of Christ at any time has declared, either as a matter of doctrine or of practice, that the grace of priestly absolution could be obtained equally without as with previous distinct confession. I say, we justly demand this: it is a demand which we have a right first to make, who can produce the decisions and practice of the church for 1000 years from the present day.

Besides this, there is, as I have just observed, the scripture, whereby the same doctrine may be confirmed. Our Lord's words are in one place: "Verily I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven."⁵ In another gospel, in words still more distinct and, if we may dare so to speak, more solemn: "When He had said this, He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whose soever sins ye remit, they are re-

⁵ S. Matt. ch. xvij. v. 18.

mitted unto them ; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.”⁶ Most true it is that these texts do not, cannot, prove the necessity of absolution ; or, as it is commonly put, the necessity of confession to our salvation. But I hold that they do prove the essential necessity of confession before priestly absolution.

It will not be disputed, that the consent of the whole Church from the beginning, where she has spoken either collectively in council, or by the mouth of individual fathers, has continually interpreted these texts “judicially,” when referred to the exercise of the power of the keys in the matter of remission of mortal sins. But (were this consent not so) if we would come to the consideration of them with unbiassed minds ; if we would forget that they have been unfairly cited to prove, simply, the necessity of absolution, and that they have been clearly shewn to fail in supporting that doctrine ; if we would free ourselves from fantastic notions of possible, yet really impossible, consequences of arguing at all about absolution from these two texts ; —if, I say, we would do this, calmly and honestly, we shall not fail to see that the power of loosing and binding, that the power of retaining and of remitting sins, cannot, in the nature of the thing, be duly exercised without a knowledge of the particular details of the case which that authority or power claims to decide. To say otherwise, is to contradict the voice of nature

⁶ S. John. ch. xx. v. 22-23.

in all analogous concerns of man, which is nothing less than to contradict the voice of God Himself: it is a setting up of a new system by which the eternal rules of justice are to be superseded.

If *in foro pænitentiae* our Blessed Saviour declared His apostles and, in the priestly office, their successors to be the authorities who should have power to bind and to loose, to remit and to retain, so great a power would be reduced into a fiction only and pretence, if it were to be used hastily, and without consideration, and without check or reason. If, in other words, it were to be used as a mere matter of course, at the will of the penitent and not of the priest. Nor can there be, I suppose, any other possible method of forming a right judgement upon each individual case, than by learning its details and circumstances. And as this knowledge cannot be, except by the voluntary accusation of the sinner by himself, in which he lays open to God's minister all his sins, how is it then that any one shall venture to say that oral confession is not by the Divine law as truly necessary to absolution, as absolution is truly a sure means of grace by which our sins are pardoned and ourselves forgiven? What are the scriptures upon which we rest to prove that absolution is really that which we declare it to be? the same texts which declare the certainty of that doctrine, declare also the necessity of confession in order to absolution.

If a distinct confession is not an essential part of the ordinance of absolution, in its complete and solemn meaning; if it is not strictly to be required, as an

essential, of every penitent, who seeks remission by means of that ordinance ; then I should hesitate before I could consent even to the permission of confession at all. That it is a spiritual discipline does not seem to me a sufficient reason for advising recourse to a practice or, if for once only, to an act which is not simply painful and difficult, but which demands great prudence and honesty and faith from both the minister and the penitent, and is, moreover, open to dangerous consequences. Therefore, I repeat, if oral confession of sins is not always an essential preliminary to the due reception of sacerdotal absolution, I incline to think that it should be utterly forbidden. Forbidden, that is, in connexion with or in apparent order to such absolution. Otherwise to check the confidence which should subsist between the people and the ministers of God's word and sacraments would be no less improper ; perhaps no less dangerous to the spiritual welfare of the members of Christ's Church. But let such a confidence, let such an intercourse, into whatever details and particulars it may descend, always be understood to be, in order to receive advice and comfort and consolation, and never in order to absolution. So understood and so allowed, we may safely assure ourselves that common sense and common prudence would keep within limits, utterly preventing all abuse, the confidential intercourse of priests and people.

And that the Church so positively, not only suffers but, "moves" penitents to confess if their consciences are troubled, is to me a proof not a little convincing

of the necessity of such confession in order to absolution. Nor is this a decision which the Church has come to, as it were, yesterday: far from it: where is the evidence within five hundred years, nay since the age itself of the apostles, that she either upon the one hand dissuaded from confession, or, upon the other, gave any man reason to suppose that he might receive sacerdotal absolution without confession? so that the canon of S. Augustine again is to be listened to: “*Quod universa tenet ecclesia, nec conciliis institutum, sed semper retentum est, non nisi auctoritate apostolica traditum rectissime creditur.*”

Add to this the conclusions which have been already drawn from the texts in the Gospels: and then, if confession is indeed essential to the due exercise and reception of absolution, no dangers which may possibly ensue can be thought a sufficient reason for the forbiddance of it. If our Blessed Lord gave authority to any ministers of His church to bind and to loose, to remit sins or to retain them, and if that authority, according to the plain meaning of the terms of the commission itself, and according to the constant voice of all antiquity, cannot be exercised *in foro pænitentiæ* without confession first made by the penitent, then, to the best of our ability and in humble reliance upon His grace Who gave the power, we must endeavour to do our duty. Nothing less than a withdrawal, in terms as positive as the original grant, of the commission under which the successors of the apostles, in their priestly office, claim to forgive sins, would ever

warrant a continued refusal to exercise that authority in the case of penitents asking to be absolved. No reasons that the Church should listen to, grounded upon the dread of possible ill results, however formidable they may seem to the world and to man's judgment, can stand in opposition to His words, Who said, "Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them ; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained." This was a command to be obeyed, as well as a commission and a power to be appealed to.

Hence, so long as the great Christian truth is acknowledged and insisted on, that all members of the Church may, at their own discretion, avail themselves or refuse to avail themselves of the grace of sacerdotal absolution, many common objections which are raised against the power to forgive and to retain sins are not worth consideration. Such, for example, as those which in reality explain that power utterly away, by denying it to be judicial, and by interpreting it of administration of the sacraments or preaching of the word of God. Let me once more say that it is no part of my purpose, nor am I called on, to prove the incorrectness of such an explanation of our Lord's promises given to the apostles and, in them, to His Church. My business is entirely with those who allow, with the church of England, the grace and spiritual effects of sacerdotal absolution. But that I may shew, in the way of suggestion, how it is that these objections are valid only against the necessity of absolution, let me notice briefly one or two.

A not uncommon method of explaining away the necessity of confession before sacerdotal absolution, after arguing justly against the necessity of absolution itself, is, by asserting that the promises of power to forgive sins, given by our Lord to His church, are fully accomplished in, and therefore refer to, the sacrament of holy baptism; in which, undeniably, remission of sin is conveyed as its especial grace. And yet, as all allow, there is no need of confession before baptism.

It is true that some of the fathers,—S. Cyril of Alexandria certainly, and (it may be) others, though I am not able to refer to them,—do speak of the promise of forgiveness of sins, to which this text relates, as being fulfilled in baptism, both as regards the minister and the person baptized. S. Cyril says⁷ that there are two ways in which God's appointed ministers retain or remit sins. It is observable that he speaks of baptism, after all, only as one of two. The first; when they admit candidates to the sacrament of baptism, who have been proved worthy by purity of living and sincerity of faith; or, on the contrary, repel them as being unworthy. The second; when they refuse to absolve those who do not repent; or, in God's name, forgive the sins of the penitent. Nor is it less to be observed that, when exercised, the remission is said by S. Cyril to be the same; that is, in kind. If, therefore sins are not merely *declared* forgiven in holy baptism, so, according to S. Cyril,

⁷ In Joan. lib. xij.

they are not *declared* only, in absolution. In both, pardon of sins is actually conveyed.

But there is no need of confession of sins before baptism, because although there is an exercise of the power of remission in that sacrament, there is not always room for the exercise of the power of retaining. Baptism is a sacrament in the administration of which faithful recipients are indeed always loosed, but by the refusal of it men are not truly bound. Not only does our reason tell us that our Lord's words must be interpreted of one and the same subject matter,—so that He cannot be understood to speak primarily and chiefly of some ministerial act in which all His promise shall not as occasions arise be completely fulfilled,—but the almost unanimous voice of the Church from the beginning has been, that this power to forgive and to retain is to be referred to those who are *within*, and not *without*, the Church. I say almost unanimous: such an example as S. Cyril just quoted can scarcely be thought to injure the chain of Catholic consent. The authority which our Lord gave to the eleven apostles was judicial: and asks S. Paul, “What have I to do to judge them that are without? them that are without God judgeth.”⁸ And, moreover, to retain sins is not merely to refuse to remit, but, as we connect the two texts in both the gospels, to retain is the same as to bind. Not to insist upon the difficulty (as it seems to me, insuperable) of exercising the power of

⁸ 1 Cor. ch. 5. v. 12

binding over any persons who are not baptized, it is clearly impossible in the case of infants. They are bound already: born in original sin and the children of wrath. Loosed indeed they may be, but they may not be bound. Therefore the commission of our Blessed Lord did not primarily relate to, as it could not be obeyed in, baptism.

Another and a modified reference of this promise to the sacrament of baptism is by those, who, denying the grace of absolution, assert that it is sufficient for sinners to remember (as they term it) their baptism. But, not again to speak of the differences which exist between the two ordinances of baptism and absolution, making the two as distinct as it is possible to be;—differences of time and words of institution; of the grace conveyed; of the subjects over whom they are to be exercised; of the ministers of each;—it is very remarkable (allowing for an instant such an explanation of our Saviour's commission) that there is very much said in the scriptures about forgiveness of sins by a true repentance, but nothing whatever of any calling back of baptism to the memory. Thus S. Peter did not desire Simon Magus to think upon his baptism, but, “Repent of this thy wickedness and pray God.” Not a word, again, of thoughts of baptism does S. Paul say, in reference to the restoration of the penitent Corinthian: nor S. John, nor S. James: but, the one; “If we confess our sins God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins:” and the other; “Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another,

etc." And, in short, if forgiveness of sins before baptism and of sins after baptism may be thus confounded, so as to reject all belief in sacerdotal absolution, except in baptism or as connected with it, it is not easy to see why the sacrament of the Lord's Supper may not as truly be explained away: and increase of grace and spiritual sustenance to be sought for and to be obtained by a recollection of the grace and blessings once given, long ago, in baptism. It would be absurd also to say another word about any especial or peculiar grace in Confirmation.

Who can find a trace of such an opinion in the early Church? if there is any one doctrine which clearly stands conspicuous in its documents, it is, the distinction between baptism and remission of post-baptismal sin. Whatever in the fathers *pænitentia* meant, it never meant baptism or remembrance of it. The *secunda post naufragium tabula* was something very different from the *prima tabula*. When S. Ambrose and Pacian argued against the Novatians, that sin might be forgiven, they spoke of such remission either as by repentance, or by the power of the keys: and S. Augustine likewise in innumerable places. Besides, on such a notion, what becomes of all their warnings, so full, so repeated, so solemn, of the difficulty of obtaining pardon of post-baptismal sin, because of its great heinousness in comparison with sin committed in the unregenerated state?⁹ It is as easy, nay easier

⁹ I do not mean that to obtain remission of sins by baptism was

held by the primitive church to be an easy and rapid business, in the

to remember baptism than to be baptized. But, not to quote more than one place, what says S. Augustine? speaking of those who, having been baptized, had sinned. “Non enim sufficit mores in melius commutare, et a factis malis recedere; nisi etiam de his quæ facta sunt, satisfiat Deo per pœnitentiæ dolorem, per humilitatis gemitum, per contriti cordis sacrificium, cooperantibus eleemosynis. Non enim dictum est, ut tantum abstineamus a peccatis: *sed et de præteritis,* inquit, *deprecare Dominum, ut tibi dimittantur.* Et Petrus jam erat fidelis, jam in Christo et alios baptizaverat. etc.”¹⁰

Again; (to return from this digression;) it is at once obvious that the penitent, by seeking absolution, himself owns, nay constitutes, the judicial character which, as to that particular, attaches to the priesthood. He acknowledges not only that God’s ministers are stewards of His mysteries, ambassadors, dispensers of the word and sacraments, but that *in foro pœnitentiæ* they have authority to bind or to loose, to forgive or to retain. It is simply impossible for him to believe in the one, namely, in the power of remission, unless he consents as fully to the other, namely, the power of retction. And if this be not judicial, it would be

case of adults. Long and arduous also for them, under the realities of the first ages of the Faith, was the preparation even for entrance into the Church of God. An admirable treatise on this question is well worth the attention of the

student, by Morinus. “De disciplina a patribus observata in catechumenorum expiatione.” 4to.—Reprinted in Zaccaria. *Thes. Theologicus. tom. x. opusc. 2.*

¹⁰ *Opera. tom. 5. p. 1362. Serm. de pœnitentia.*

hard to say what can be so. Nor let that idle consequence be supposed to follow, that, if judicial, this power is also at the mere will and pleasure of the priest. In one sense it is; but in no other sense than that in which all judicial power may be said to be exercised according to the will and pleasure of the judge. Although strictly judicial, the sacerdotal power of forgiving sins is as strictly ministerial. The ministers of Christ, whom He has appointed to dispense His grace, act not upon their own authority, nor in their own name; but in the Name of God, according to plain laws and by certain means prescribed by Him.

Again, how utterly inadequate is that explanation of the famous texts in S. Matthew and S. John, which refers them only to outward discipline, or to preaching of the gospel.

Power and authority to carry on the external government of the Church, to rebuke and to punish offenders, to expel them from communion, to re-admit penitents, to enact canons and to enforce them; all this and the like must have been, from the very nature itself of the Christian Church as one body under one Head. But the words of the Saviour were, “It shall be bound in heaven;” “it shall be loosed in heaven;” that is, before and in the sight of God. In His sight, we say, in some far different sense from that in which all things whether in heaven or on earth are before Him. No greater delegated authority than this can, I suppose, be exercised by the Church: it is answer-

able to that in civil jurisdiction, which extends to life or death. Excommunication and the lighter censures of the Church which sustain outward unity by enforcing outward discipline are powers of a very inferior kind. The assurance which was given to the Church, of authority to forgive and to retain sins, raised her, by the alone fact of the assurance, into the highest and the last tribunal upon earth. A tribunal which is to be resorted to by the guilty of their own voluntary will; not a tribunal before which all members of the Church must of necessity appear, if they would be saved.

And mark the repetition of this commission in the gospel of S. John. "When He had said this, He breathed on them and said, Receive ye the Holy Ghost." Can an act so solemn, can words so weighty, intend and no more than intend, Tell men that their sins shall be forgiven? no more than, Tell them that if they will believe on me, if they will be baptized, that then they shall be saved? Set aside all consent of old tradition; all contending arguments against and for that consent; take the scripture and the scripture only; and is this, I ask, the first, full, plain, obvious meaning of that deed and saying of our Divine Redeemer?

I shall refer to one or two places from the fathers, out of many which might be heaped up, if there were occasion.

But before we do this, I would observe, that the reader in examining extracts from the fathers which

relate to the great ordinance of absolution and to the ancient discipline of penance, must always be especially careful to distinguish, first, whether the author cited is writing generally upon the power of absolution in the priesthood, or upon the exercise of that power under particular circumstances : and, secondly, if confession to man is spoken of, either as being necessary or unnecessary, he must ascertain the exact purpose for which it is so spoken of. Nothing has led to greater confusion in this whole question,—I repeat it at the risk of being wearisome,—nothing, I say, more than producing from the fathers passages which prove clearly enough that confession to man is not necessary to our salvation, by way of proving, what they do not and cannot prove, that confession is not necessary to the true exercise of sacerdotal absolution.

I am not at all inclined to dispute how far the position of a very learned writer is correct, that “in all the places [quoted by him] in which the fathers speak of the necessity of confession, they have regard to it, first, as the door to a course of public penance, which humbled the penitent, subjected him to a healthful discipline, and kept him for a while from the Holy Communion which might be hurtful to him ; secondly, as obtaining for individuals spiritual counsel for the specific case of each ; thirdly, as gaining the intercessions of the Church, and so of Christ.”¹¹ And whilst

¹¹ Library of the Fathers. *Tertullian*, by Dr. Pusey. Note. M. p. 380.

this may be so upon the one hand, how conclusive are other places quoted from the fathers by the same writer, (and I would add, almost numberless other declarations, express or implied) which assure the repentant sinner, that if he will confess his sins to God alone, it shall be sufficient.

To name no more, it has been well said of S. Chrysostom, that he urges this truth “so repeatedly, and so strongly, as to leave no question as to his meaning. Thus he says, ‘Not this alone is wondrous, that God remits us our sins, but that He does not reveal, nor make them manifest or open, nor *compels* us to come forward and speak out our transgressions, but bids us plead before Him alone, and confess to Him.’ . . . Again, putting the words into the very mouth of God, ‘I compel thee not. Tell Me alone thy sin apart, that I may heal the sore, and free thee from the pain.’ . . . In another place, ‘Let us persuade ourselves that we have sinned. Let us not say so with the tongue only, but with the mind; let us not call ourselves only sinners, but let us also count up our sins, recounting each severally. I tell thee not, expose thyself to public show, nor accuse thyself to others, but I counsel thee to obey the prophet who saith, *Reveal thy way unto the Lord*; confess these things unto God; confess thy sins to the Judge; praying, if not with the tongue, yet with the memory, and to obtain mercy.’”¹² I wish much that I could quote

¹² *Ibid. p. 399.*

here, so very valuable are these testimonies of S. Chrysostome, more such places from his works : but I must content myself with adding only the conclusion of the same writer : “ There could ” he most truly and justly observes, “ be no way in which confession to God alone, exclusive of man, could be expressed, if not here. S. Chrysostom says ‘ to God alone,’ ‘ apart in private’ (*κατ’ ιδιαν*) ‘ to Him who knoweth beforehand,’ ‘ no one knowing,’ ‘ no one present save Him Who knoweth,’ ‘ God alone seeing,’ ‘ unwitnessed,’ ‘ not to man,’ ‘ within,’ ‘ in the conscience,’ ‘ judging thyself,’ &c. Accordingly, one Romanist writer boldly pronounces all these passages spurious ; and (since they are unquestionable) another, of great name, Petavius, condemns them as being uttered in a declamatory way to the ignorant multitude for the sake of impressiveness. But certainly, poor as such an excuse would be for what, according to Romanists, is false teaching, the passages are too numerous and too uniform, to admit of it ; they manifestly contain S. Chrysostom’s settled teaching.”¹³

I do more than consent to, I assert that these and

¹³ Ibid. p. 401. Dr. Pusey adds to *Judging thyself* “ [in lieu of the priest being the judge.]” True; but is it also true, if the priest was to be applied to for the grace of absolution ? Again, “ in church, to God.” It is added “ [i. e. in the general confession.] ” S. Chrysostom does not

say anything of a general confession: the Church is a holy place, in which men may, privately and alone, piously and well confess their sins to God. But even were that father’s words so to be taken ; does he go on to speak of “ absolution ” that is, sacerdotal absolution, following ?

such passages prove, so far as a thing is capable of proof, that confession to man is not essential to salvation ; that it is not necessary in order that we may receive pardon from God of sins committed after baptism ; and being not necessary, it is left entirely to each and every one to be resorted to at his own discretion. But, to the point really before us now, the authors appealed to decide, in the places cited, nothing at all : they stop, just where they are required to speak ; they are in them utterly silent against the necessity of confession in order to receive the grace of absolution. And it is a very remarkable thing, that they do so stop : whilst they loudly teach us of God forgiving sins confessed to Him alone, they do not give a hint, however distant, that such forgiveness shall be conveyed by means of His ministers upon earth ; by the means, that is, of sacerdotal absolution.

And whilst the fathers upon the one hand furnish us with abundant confirmation of the great scriptural truth, that priestly absolution is not of necessity to salvation ; and, upon the other hand do not tell us that such absolution, if sought for, can be obtained without previous oral and distinct confession ; so moreover, there is very much indeed in their works which cannot be understood or explained except upon the fact, that the exercise of “the power of the keys” is a judicial act ; that it is not to be referred to the mere preaching of the gospel, and that confession beforehand is an essential requisite. I shall lay before the reader a few places to this effect, which will enable

him to see the principle upon which the doctrine of absolution was held by the early Church; and to which, as a principle, we are to bring particular cases, if at any time they seem to present a difficulty; more than a difficulty they do not make; they do not, as a whole, complete a contradiction.

Passing by the book of S. Chrysostom on the Priesthood, which is well-known to most of the clergy of our Church, in which (citing the text from S. John) he distinctly declares that God has given to men who dwell upon earth a power which He has not thought fit to entrust even to angels or archangels;¹⁴ let us take S. Ambrose.

“ Sed aiunt,” he tells us of the Novatians, “ se Domino deferre reverentiam, cui soli remittendorum criminum potestatem reseruent. Immo nulli majorem injuriam faciunt, quam qui cujus volunt mandata rescindere, commissum munus refundere. Nam cum ipse in evangelio suo dixerit Dominus Jesus; *Accipite Spiritum Sanctum; quorum remiseritis peccata,* etc. quis est ergo qui magis honorat, utrum qui mandatis obtemperat, an qui resistit? Ecclesia in utroque servat obedientiam, ut peccatum et alliget et relaxet. Hæresis in altero immitis, in altero inobediens, vult ligare quod non resolvat, non vult solvere quod ligavit; in quo se sua damnat sententia. Dominus enim par jus et solvendi esse voluit et ligandi, qui utrumque pari conditione permisit. Ergo qui solvendi jus non habet,

¹⁴ *Lib. 3. ch. 5.*

nec ligandi habet. Sicut enim secundum Dominicam sententiam, qui ligandi jus habet, et solvendi habet, ita istorum assertio seipsam strangulat, ut quia solvendi sibi jus negant, negare debeant et ligandi. Quomodo igitur potest alterum licere, alterum non licere? Quibus donatum utrumque est, aut utrumque licere manifestum est, aut utrumque non licere certum est. Ecclesiae utrumque licet, haeresi utrumque non licet; jus enim hoc solis permissum sacerdotibus est. Recte igitur ecclesia vindicat, quae veros sacerdotes habet: haeresis vindicare non potest, quae sacerdotes Dei non habet.”¹⁵

Not to notice particularly other very remarkable points in this extract, let me ask whether it is possible that the Novatians could have produced so absurd an assertion, or that S. Ambrose should have thought it worth his while to deny, that the ministers of the Church have no commission or authority to preach remission of sins, but that it is an office or prerogative to be attributed to God alone? The power which the Novatians denied was the judicial power of remitting and of retaining sins; sins, not public against outward discipline, but secret, after baptism, deadly, in the sight of God. S. Ambrose contends against them: and he rests his argument upon the words of our Lord, “Receive ye the Holy Ghost; whose soever sins ye forgive, etc.”¹⁶

¹⁵ *De pœnit.* lib. I. cap. 2. S. Ambrose. “Si vis justificari, Opera. tom. 2. p. 391. fatere delictum tuum. Solvit enim

¹⁶ There is another passage in criminum nexus verecunda con-

Again, S. Hilary : in his commentary on the gospel of S. Matthew. “ Ad terrorem autem metus maximi, quo in præsens omnes continerentur, immobile severitatis apostolicæ judicium præmisit : ut quos in terris ligaverint, id est, peccatorum nodis innexos reliquerint, et quos solverint, confessione videlicet veniæ receperint in salutem ; hi apostolicæ conditione sententiæ in cœlis quoque aut soluti sint aut ligati.”¹⁷ It has been said that S. Hilary here speaks only of confession generally, without explanation. Even if it be so, it does not prove, as it has been (to my wonder) brought to prove, that absolution may be given without confession. On the contrary, as it would be nonsense to refer *veniæ* to *confessione* and not to the succeeding words *in salutem*, I insist that S. Hilary connects confession, as an essential, with the exercise of the power of binding and loosing.

fessio peccatorum.” *De pœnit.* lib. 2. cap. vj. I place this in a note, because it is not clear that S. Ambrose alludes to more than to that private confession to the Almighty, which is sufficient for pardon from Him. And the Benedictine editors admit that although appealed to for the purpose of shewing the necessity of confession before absolution, the passage falls short. “ Fatendum est a nobis hic desiderari summam illam evidentiam.” Nevertheless they incline to think that the holy father did intend so to be understood. Nor, being entitled to an opinion

at least regarding it, do I hesitate to say that the passage appears in the same light to myself; that is, to relate to sacerdotal absolution. The whole subject of the book is, *de pœnitentia*. And immediately after the sentence just quoted is the following : “ Vides quid a te exigat Deus tuus, ut memor sis ejus quam accepisti gratiæ, et non glorieris quasi non acceperis. Vides qua remissionis pollicitatione te provocet ad confitendum.” This scarcely looks like the language of one urging the duty of private confession only to God.

¹⁷ §. 8. *Opera.* p. 699.

This extract from S. Hilary must not be left without also remarking that Dallæus, who notices it, has no other explanation of it to give, than to urge, first, that the whole force of it rests upon the single word *confessione*; and that if that one word was not there, the sentence would not prove that confession must precede absolution. Who ever pretended to the contrary? But the word *is* there: then says Dallæus, against the evidence of all the manuscripts and all the editions even of Erasmus), that the true reading is *concessione*. “Omnino locum corrigendum putaverim, et levi mutatione legendum; et quos solverint, concessione scilicet veniæ receperint in salutem. Sic enim omnia clara sunt, et expedita.”¹⁸ Easy, truly, is such a method of argument; and marvellous the changes which it would produce. We need only, when we are hard pressed by any passage of an ancient father, or of the Holy Scriptures, use our pleasant liberty of “slightly altering” the text. I am glad of this opportunity of mentioning Dallæus: for it enables me to remind the reader that the true object of his work (and an able and learned work it is) *de confessione auriculari*, does not turn upon the question of the necessity of confession in order to absolution, but of the necessity of sacerdotal absolution in order to salvation. And it is not to be forgotten that he denies that doctrine which the church of England holds, namely, the spiritual grace of such an absolution: he denies it, by ex-

¹⁸ De confess. lib. 3. cap. ix.

plaining it away. Nor could he do otherwise, according to the tenets of his particular sect, the Calvinists. It would be well sometimes, if men's opinions upon vital matters of the Christian Faith were honestly stated and understood, before they are cited (almost as a matter of course) as trustworthy authorities to whom we might refer.

Again, S. Jerome: in one of his epistles pressing his friend to return to the monastic life, he is led to speak of the clergy. He asks, “*An de his aliquid audeam dicere, qui certe in suis urbibus commorantur?* *Absit ut de his quidquam sinistrum loquar, quia apostolico gradu succedentes, Christi Corpus sacro ore conficiunt; per quos et nos Christiani sumus. Qui claves regni cœlorum habentes, quodammodo ante iudicii diem judicant.*”¹⁹ It is upon this passage that bishop Sparrow in his sermon already mentioned above, p. 19, observes, “he that can construe *judicant*, and understand what it signifies, needs no comment upon the words.” Nor indeed do they require explanation: to administer the three means of grace,—all great though not all necessary to our salvation, namely, baptism, the eucharist, and absolution,—is here declared by S. Jerome to be the high office and dignity of the priesthood.

Again, S. Gregory the great: he preaches in his 26th homily on the gospels, upon the end of the 20th chapter of S. John. Coming to the 21st verse he says:

¹⁹ Epist. xiv. *ad Heliodorum*. Opera. tom. i. p. 34.

“ Sciendum vero est, quod hi qui prius Spiritum Sanctum habuerunt, ut et ipsi innocenter viverent, et in prædicatione quibusdam prodessem; idcirco hunc post resurrectionem Domini potenter acceperunt, ut prodesse non paucis, sed pluribus possent. Unde et in hac ipsa datione Spiritus dicitur; *Quorum remiseritis peccata, remittuntur eis: et quorum retinueritis, retenuta sunt.* Libet intueri, illi discipuli ad tanta onera humilitatis vocati, ad quantum culmen gloriæ sint perducti. Ecce non solum de semetipsis securi fiunt, sed etiam alienæ obligationis potestatem et relaxationis accipiunt; principatumque superni judicii sortiuntur, ut vice Dei quibusdam peccata retineant, quibusdam relaxent. Sic eos a Deo decebat erigi, qui tantum pro Deo consenserant humiliari. Ecce qui districtum Dei judicium metuunt, animarum judices fiunt; et alios damnant vel liberant, qui semetipsos damnari metuebant Causæ ergo pensandæ sunt, et tunc ligandi atque solvendi potestas exercenda. Videndum est quæ culpa præcessit, aut quæ sit poenitentia secuta post culpam: ut quos omnipotens Deus per compunctionis gratiam visitat, illos pastoris sententia absolvat.”²⁰

²⁰ *Lib. 2. homil. xxvj. Opera. tom. i. p. 1555.*

I cannot resist quoting in a note the remainder of this section, placing as it does the illustration which, every one knows, is so often brought from the raising of Lazarus in a most striking way.

S. Gregory continues. “ Tunc enim vera est absolutio præsidentis, cum interni arbitrium sequitur judicis. Quod bene quatriduani mortui resuscitatio illa significat, quæ videlicet demonstrat, quia prius mortuum Dominus vocavit et vivificavit, dicens: *Lazare,*

And S. Gregory the great brings us, by an immediate link, to England, and through S. Augustin,

veni foras: et postmodum is qui vivens egressus fuerat a discipulis est solutus, sicut scriptum est: *Cumque egressus esset qui fuerat ligatus institis, tunc dixit discipulis: Solvite eum, et sinite abire.* Ecce illum discipuli jam viventem solvunt, quem magister resuscitaverat mortuum. Si enim discipuli Lazarum mortuum solverent, fœtorem magis ostenderent, quam virtutem. Ex qua consideratione intuendum est, quod illos nos debemus per pastoralem auctoritatem solvere, quos auctorem nostrum cognoscimus per suscitantem gratiam vivificare. Quæ nimur vivificatio ante operationem rectitudinis in ipsa jam cognoscitur confessione peccati. Unde et huic ipsi mortuo Lazaro nequaquam dicitur, *Revivisce*: sed, *Veni foras*. Omnis quippe peccator dum culpam suam intra conscientiam abscondit, introrsum latet, in suis penetralibus occultatur. Sed mortuus venit foras, cum peccator nequitias suas sponte confitetur. Lazaro ergo dicitur, *Veni foras*. Ac si aperte cuilibet mortuo in culpa diceretur; cur reatum tuum intra conscientiam abscondis? Foras jam per confessionem egredere, qui apud te interius per negationem lates. Veniat itaque foras mortuus, id est culpam con-

fiteatur peccator. Venientem vero foras solvant discipuli."

S. Augustine also: "Remissio peccatorum, solutio est. Quid enim prodesset Lazaro, quia processit de monumento, nisi diceretur, *Solvite eum, et sinite abire?* Ipse quidem voce de sepulchro suscitavit, ipse clamando animam reddidit, ipse terrenam molem sepolto impositam vicit, et processit ille vinctus: non ergo pedibus propriis, sed virtute producentis. Fit hoc in corde pœnitentis: cum audis hominem pœnitere peccatorum suorum, jam revixit: cum audis hominem confitentem proferre conscientiam, jam de sepulchro eductus est, sed nondum solutus est. Quando solvitur? a quibus solvitur? Quæ solveritis, inquit, in terra, erunt soluta et in cœlo. Merito per ecclesiam dari solutio peccatorum potest: suscittari autem ipse mortuus non nisi intus clamante Domino potest: hæc enim Deus interius agit." *In ps. 101. serm. ij. tom. 4. p. 1103.*

Again, the same father, in his 50th tract upon the gospel of S. John: in words to which I beg the reader's especial attention. "*Lazare, veni foras.* Quomodo processit ligatis pedibus miraris, et non miraris, quia surrexit quadriuanus? in utroque potentia

Venerable Bede, Egbert, and a long line of saints, to S. Anselm and the 12th century. I have already spoken of the penitentials of Bede and archbishops Theodore and Egbert. Here we may also add one or two further notices about confession and absolution, taken from the early records of the Anglo-saxon church. Nor do I doubt but that these will, especially, meet the requirements of some whose opinion on the whole matter I justly value.

Archbishop Theodore has this rule in his penitential: “*Siquis non pœnitet, et forsitan ceciderit in ægritudinem, et quæsierit communicare, non prohibeat, et date ei sanctam communionem, ita tamen ut omnia sit ante confessus.*”²¹

Again; archbishop Egbert; also in his penitential: “*Hoc necesse est, ut sacerdos hujusmodi hominem*

*Domini erat, non vires mortui.
Processit, et adhuc ligatus est:
adhuc involutus, tamen jam foras
processit. Quid significat? Quan-
do contemnis, mortuus jaces:
quando confiteris, procedis. Quid
est enim procedere, nisi ab occul-
tis velut exeundo manifestari? sed
ut confitearis, Deus facit magna
voce clamando, id est, magna gra-
tia vocando. Ideo cum proces-
sisset mortuus adhuc ligatus, con-
fites et adhuc reus: ut solver-
tentur peccata ejus, ministris hoc
dixit Dominus, *Solvite illum, et
sinite abire.* Quid est *Solvite et
sinite abire?* Quæ solveritis in*

terra, soluta erunt et in cœlo.”
Tom. 3. p. 627.

Again, S. Ambrose: “*Veni
foras:* hoc est, Qui jaces in tene-
bris conscientiæ, et delictorum
tuorum sordibus, quodam reorum
carcere, exi foras, delictum pro-
prium prode, ut justificeris: *Ore
enim confessio fit ad salutem.* Si
confessus fueris, a Christo voca-
tus, claustra rumpentur, et omnia
solventur vincula, etiam si cor-
ruptelæ corporeæ fœtor gravis
sit.” *De pœnit. lib. 2. cap. 7.*
tom. 2. p. 429.

²¹ Thorpe; Ancient laws and institutes. vol. 2. p. 49.

consoletur, et confessionem ejus audiat, et ei saltem eucharistiam non deneget ; et quamvis ab illa infirmitate adeo labefactus sit, ut loqui nequeat, sicut antea poterat, tamen si testimonium habeat illorum hominum qui cum eo sunt, quod confessionem et eucharistiam desideravisset, tunc sacerdos ei remissionem det, et ritus ejus exequatur." In the same book of the penitential ; "Homo qui multis criminibus vinctus est, et ea, cum animo compuncto, et ex amore vitae æternæ, confessario suo confiteri, et, prout ipse ei præscriperit, emendare velit, credimus quod apud Deum remissionem habeat."

The Anglo-saxon ecclesiastical institutes, are much to our purpose, both as to the duty of confessing only to God, and of confession in order to sacerdotal absolution. "Every day we ought twice or oftener, if we can, in our prayer, to confess our sins to God, according to what the prophet says; . . . then, after the confession, we should pray to the Lord . . . The confession of our sins, which we make to priests, does this for our good, that we may thereby blot out our sins. [pe mid pon mazon vne ȝynna aðilizian.] But the confessions which we confess to God alone, does this for our good : the oftener that we remember them, so does God the sooner forget them. But on the contrary, the oftener that we forget misdeeds, the more readily does God remember them . . . Every sin a man shall confess to his confessor, which he ever committed, either in word, or in work, or in thought. When any one comes to his confessor, for the sake of

telling him his deeds and confessing his sins, then ought the confessor earnestly to ask him concerning those things which he confesses. The confessor shall ask him everything, who imparts his need to him, and enjoins him to hide nothing from him, neither in word nor in work, of what he supposes he may ever have wrought against God's will." Again, in the same: "Penance is like to a second baptism; and in baptism the sins before committed are forgiven: so also through penance the sins are purified, which were committed after baptism: [ſrp̄a beoð eac pvrh pa ðædbote zeclænþode pa ȝynna pe æfteƿ pam ƿulpihþe zeƿpe mede beoð]."²²

Of Bede we shall hear presently: take now this from his 27th homily. "*Et quodcumque ligaveris*, etc. Quæ solvendi atque ligandi potestas, quamvis soli Petro videatur a Domino data, absque ulla tamen dubietate noscendum est, quia et cæteris apostolis datur ipso teste qui post passionis resurrectionisque suæ triumphum, apparens eis insufflavit, et dixit eis, *Accipite Spiritum Sanctum*, etc. Necnon etiam nunc in episcopis ac presbyteris omni ecclesiæ officium idem committitur, ut videlicet agnitis peccantium causis, quoscumque humiles ac vere poenitentes aspexerit, hos jam a timore perpetuae mortis miserans absolvat: quos vero in peccatis qui egerint persistere cognoverit, illos perennibus suppliciis obligandos insinuet."²³

At a somewhat later period, archbishop Ælfric. In

²² Ibid. p. 173. 179. 427. 435.

²³ *Opera. tom. 5. p. 198.*

his homily for the first sunday after Easter, he thus applies the miracle of the raising of Lazarus. Having declared that our Lord gave power to forgive sins to His apostles and, in them, to their successors, he goes on to say : “ Christ raised from death the stinking Lazarus, and when he was quickened, He said to His disciples, loose his bands, that he may go. They loosed the bands of the requickened man, whom Christ had raised to life. Therefore should our teachers unbind from their sins those whom Christ quickens by stimulation. Every sinful man who conceals his sins, lies dead in the sepulchre ; but if he confesses his sins through stimulation, then he goes from the sepulchre, as Lazarus did, when Christ bade him arise : then shall the teacher unbind him from the eternal punishment, as the apostles bodily unbound Lazarus.”²⁴ Again, in another place, speaking of sacerdotal absolution ; “ Let no man be ashamed to make known his sins to one teacher, for he who will not in this world confess his sins with true repentance, shall be put to shame before God Almighty, and before His hosts of angels, and before all men, at the great doom. His shame shall be endless. For no man obtains forgiveness of his sins from God, unless he confess them to some man of God, and by his doom expiate them : [and be his dōme gebete].”²⁵ The question is not whether Ælfric thought absolution to be of necessity to remis-

²⁴ Homilies of Ælfric. vol. 1.
p. 235.

²⁵ *In xl. Of penitence.* Ibid.
vol. 2. p. 603.

sion of sins, but, whether he believed that confession was an essential preliminary.

Passing onwards, the tract of archbishop Lanfranc *de celanda confessione* is worth the careful perusal of the reader. It is somewhat obscure both in its immediate object and language: still, no one can fail to perceive from it how distinctly in Lanfranc's judgement, sacerdotal absolution and forgiveness of God depended upon a previous confession. I shall quote one sentence. “*Visibilia sacramenta et operantur, et significant invisibilia. In hoc cognoscimus quia de occultis omni ecclesiastico ordini confiteri debemus; de apertis vero solis convenit sacerdotibus, per quos ecclesia, quæ publice novit, et solvit, et ligat.*”²⁵

There can be no doubt that here venial sins are distinguished by the term *occulta*, from open, *aperta peccata*; that is, (as his editor remarks) *aperte mala*. In this sense the words of the venerable Bede are to be understood in his commentary upon S. James: where, first connecting, as equally indispensable, confession and amendment with absolution, he thus speaks: “*Si ergo infirmi in peccatis sint, et hæc presbyteris ecclesiæ confessi fuerint, ac perfecto corde ea relinquare atque emendare satagerint, dimittentur eis.*” And he emphatically repeats this necessity of promise of amendment, no less than of confession of the past. “*Neque enim sine confessione emendationis, peccata queunt dimitti.*” And then he continues; “*Unde*

²⁵ Opera. p. 381.

recte subjungitur, *Confitemini ergo alterutrum*, etc. In hac autem sententia, illa debet esse discretio, ut quotidiana leviaque peccata alterutrum coæqualibus confiteamur, eorumque quotidiana credamus oratione salvari. Porro gravioris lepræ immunditiam juxta legem sacerdotii pandamus, atque ad ejus arbitrium qualiter et quanto tempore juss erit, purificare cures mus.”²⁷ And Dachier upon the same place of Archbishop Lanfranc cites the following from a contemporary ; (Radulphus Ardens, A. D. 1100 : the author of some homilies :) much to the purpose : inasmuch as it sufficiently explains the exposition of Bede also. “Cui fieri debet confessio ? Confessio criminalium debet fieri sacerdoti, et nominatim, qui solus habeat potestatem ligandi atque solvendi, sicut ut lepræ judicium solis sacerdotibus in lege erat commissum. Confessio vero venialium, alterutri et cuilibet, etiam minori potest fieri : quoniam propter venialia non separatur homo a Deo, nisi per incuriam. Fit autem hæc confessio, non quod possit a peccatis absolvere, sed quia propter propriam humiliationem, et peccatorum nostrorum

²⁷ Opera. tom. 12. p. 201. *In epist. Jacobi. cap. v.*

I would quote another place of Bede, to the same purpose : and with an evident allusion (as it seems) to the public confessions and absolutions in divine service. “Ipse [Dominus] levioribus quotidiane nostris erratibus, sine quibus hæc vita transigi non po-

test, quotidiana confessionis et intercessionis mutuae medicamenta concessit ; dicens per apostolum Jacobum : *Confitemini alterutrum peccata vestra, et orate pro invicem ut salvemini.* Ipse rogari ut præstet, admonet, qui animos inopum ad se rogandum largus donator erigit.” Homil. viij. tom. 5. p. 49.

accusationem, mundamur a peccatis. Unde et non dicimus: *Ego dimitto tibi peccata tua*; sed dicimus orando: *Misereatur tui omnipotens Deus*, etc.”²⁸ Here is a most plain reference, it may be further remarked, to the general forms of absolution in the public offices of the Church.

There are many parts of S. Anselm’s works which are concerned with the doctrine of repentance and absolution. I can do no more than extract a few sentences. In his fifth homily, upon a gospel from S. Matthew, speaking of the cruel servant, he connects, as an acknowledged truth, confession and repentance in order to forgiveness. “*Per confessionem ac pœnitentiam, dimisit ei debitum omne culparum.*” Again, upon a gospel from S. Luke, and the healing of the lepers. “*Quos ut intuitu clementiae vidit, dixit, Ite ostendite vos sacerdotibus, id est, per humilem oris confessionem sacerdotibus veraciter manifestate omnes interioris lepræ vestræ maculas, ut mundari possitis. Et quod rogabant, factum est eis dum irent ad sacerdotes; quia, sc. mundati sunt; quoniam peccatores, licet gravi criminum lepra sint fœdati, eentes tamen ad confitendum purgantur in ipsa confessione propter pœnitentiam, quam acturi sunt. Dum irent, mundati sunt; quia ex quo iter hoc intrant, incipiunt operari justitiam, et justitiae operatio est eorum mundatio. Dum irent, mundati sunt; quia ex quo tendentes ad confessionem et pœnitentiam, tota deliberatione mentis*

²⁸ *Conc. in lit. maj. cit. p. 384. Animadvers. L. Dacherii.*

peccata sua damnant, et deserunt; liberantur ab eis in conspectu interni inspectoris. Perveniendum tamen est ad sacerdotes, et ab eis querenda solutio; ut qui jam coram Deo sunt mundati, sacerdotum judicio etiam hominibus ostendantur mundi.”²⁹

Again, in his *Meditations*: a work which it would be well for many of us most carefully to study: abounding, as they do, with thoughts most pious and divine.

²⁹ This passage of S. Anselm leads me to say one word upon a subject on which very much might be and has been written; namely, the separate efficacy of each act of the penitent and of the priest towards the final completion of remission of sins in the ordinance of absolution. The schoolmen enquired very particularly into this, and, some of them at least, attempted to define it accurately. Hence for example came the exact distinctions which were insisted on between contrition and attrition; hence the enquiry how far the words of the priest at last, when all was finished and in his judgement sufficient, declared rather than conveyed remission. But whilst we must lament that later writers have availed themselves of these scholastical disputations, to involve the real matter in much obscurity, by citing sometimes one author and sometimes another, to prove some heretical doctrine, yet the fact remains perfectly undeniable

that none of them so treated absolution as a whole, as to make it a mere idle ceremony, effecting nothing, conveying nothing, remitting nothing. The schoolmen began with the entire acceptance of the great truth, that sacerdotal absolution is an ordinance of Christ, instituted by Him, and accompanied with His sure promise. But, as I cannot discuss this now, let me remind the reader of the wise words of S. Bernard, to one anxious to learn too minutely; in days when the speculations of the schools were about to commence. “Nunquid patribus doctiores aut devotiores sumus? Periculose præsumimus quidquid ipsorum in talibus prudentia præterivit. Nec vero id tale est, quod nisi prætereundum fuerit, patrum quiverit omnino diligentiam præteriisse.” *Epist. 174. tom. 1. p. 170.* Or, about the same period, Hugo S. Victor. “Quia de auctoritate nihil habemus, de nostro sensu nihil asserere de his audemus.” *Summæ, Tr. 6. cap. ix.*

S. Anselm thus speaks in the sixth. “ Nullum est enim tam grave peccatum, quod non possit per pœnitentiam aboleri, ita ut nec jam amplius vel ipse diabolus de eo valeat reminisci. Cernentes ergo peccatores tantam dulcedinem creatoris sui, cœperunt et ipsi certatim ad fontem currere misericordiæ, ad fontem pietatis, et peccata sua in eo lavare. Cœpit autem et ipse fons pietatis cum peccatoribus convesci, cœpit eis aperire sacramenta confessionis sanctæ, per quam alleviatur omne onus peccati: quia in vera confessione mundatur omnis macula delicti.” In the same meditation, how excellent are these words: upon the efficacy, always, of a sincere repentance; “ Nullus ergo peccator desperet, quando fornicata cum multis amatoribus recipitur, quia fons pietatis et misericordiæ Jesus Christus, nullius [al. nullis] iniquitatibus exhaustur, nullius sceleribus polluitur; sed semper purus et abundans gratia dulcedinis, omnes ad se revertentes infirmos et peccatores recipit; et quibusunque peccatis sint maculati, abluit. Et ut certi sint omnes peccatores et iniqui se veniam peccatorum suorum accipere, si ipsa peccata sua curant dimitti et pœnitentiam agere; ipse fons pietatis, pro amore quem erga nos habebat, eandem carnem quam pro eis sumpsit, sicut superius exposui, pertulit crucifigi: ut qui erant peccatis mortui, nec aliter ad vitam redire poterant, nisi pretio sanguinis ejus redempti, nullo modo desperent, cernentes pretium quod est datum pro peccatis suis.” And, once more, still in the same meditation: “ Latro vero ille, qui pro suis sceleribus Tecum crucifixus est,

usque ad ipsius animæ exitum semper in peccatis fuit: sed tamen in ipsa hora suæ expirationis, quia sua mala confessus est, et culpam clamavit, misericordiam inventit: et Tecum in ipso die in paradyso fuit.”³⁰

³⁰ Opera. p. 168. 185. 213.

I place in a note another passage; from the *Elucidarium*, which some doubt to be S. Anselm's; but, by whomsoever, a contemporary work. “*Discip.* Quid valet confessio? *Magister.* Quantum baptismus. Sicut enim in baptismo originalia, ita in confessione remittuntur peccata actualia. *D.* Est etiam judicium? *M.* Duo sunt judicia Dei: unum hic per confessionem; aliud in ultimo die per examinationem: in quo ipse Deus judex erit, diabolus accusator, homo reus. In isto vero sacerdos, Christi vicarius, judex; homo et accusator et reus; pœnitentia est sententia. Qui hic judicatur, non ibi accusatur, ut dicitur; *Non judicat Deus bis in idipsum;* et alibi; *Si nos judicaremus non utique judicaremur.*” Lib. 2. cap. xix. *Ibid. p. 475.*

The following will serve to illustrate S. Anselm's argument from the example of the penitent thief: part of a pious tract by a contemporary of his own, upon the last words of our Blessed

Lord. “Quasi plagarum et sanguinis immemor, dictator evangelii latro efficitur; et Christum Deum in cruce fatetur; ibi orat, ibi adorat, multa simul pietatis officia complectitur. Credit, timet, compungitur, et pœnitet, confitetur, et prædicat, amat, confidit, et orat . . . Pœnitentia concutitur, confessione purgatur; . . . Ne irascaris, princeps apostolorum: tibi dico, Petre, cui claves regni cœlorum commissæ sunt . . . Nec ibi apostolica auctoritate utebris, ubi ad invicem fixis juxta crucibus privata miscent colloquia salvator et peccator. Absens eras, et ministerii tui claves modo non profers. Supplet vicem tuam summus sacerdos . . . Inter cætera pietatis exempla, latro noster nobis occurrit, pœnitentiae regula, confessionis forma, indulgentiae præco, spei exemplum: qui dum ingemit, subito quod querit invenit, quod petit accipit, et illico audit, Hodie mecum eris in paradyso.” *Arnold. Carnotensis, in bibl. patr. tom. 22. p. 1266.*

CHAPTER IX.

ET me now proceed, in this chapter, to offer some general considerations,--which, although they may not be singly or alone of sufficient weight to determine the question which we have been discussing, are yet, as it seems to me, not altogether valueless in confirmation of what, I trust, has been shewn to be the teaching of the church of England upon absolution. We all know how satisfactory it often is to find that arguments from other sources support doctrines and statements which we are already prepared to receive; or, on the other hand to find, if difficulties may be suggested against one opinion, that they are less and fewer in number than may be produced against another opinion which we may be called upon to accept instead.

It is said that sacerdotal absolution is not necessary as a means of grace for the remission of sins, because remission is to be received in the sacrament of the Blessed Eucharist. As to its necessity, all through this work from time to time I have repeated my firm conviction that such absolution is not necessary

for remission of sins ; in other words, that it is not necessary to our salvation. But, if I am asked to explain to what extent in individual cases it is not necessary, I should refuse to reply. It cannot but be the duty of every minister in the church of England to leave, as she has herself left, that question unanswered.

The Church in her ordinal speaking to those who are being admitted into "the holy office of priesthood," into that "high dignity and weighty charge," gives them power to forgive and to retain sins ;—in her ritual she appoints a form of absolution, which, after hearing the confession of the penitent, they are to use ;—she desires them to "move" the sick man to make a special confession, if he feel his conscience troubled ;—she invites all who have unquiet consciences to go to her ministers, and at their hands to receive by the ministry of God's holy word the benefit of absolution. Who then among us will attempt to distinguish, by laying down general rules, when men ought and when men ought not to avail themselves of this great privilege and means of grace which God and His Church offer them ? Who among us will venture to nullify the exhortations which we are commanded to make, and the warnings which it is our duty constantly to press, by limiting the necessity of sacerdotal absolution ? Our people have full liberty to resort to absolution or not ; and, so far as the Church can say generally to each, with a safe conscience. On the other hand they are all invited, they are exhorted, they are to be moved, to confess in order to receive absolution. There the

Church of England, with most wise moderation, leaves the matter; there, as it seems to me, all her ministers should leave it also.

I cannot enter into any enquiry which could possibly do justice to the subject, how far the blessed eucharist is rightly to be regarded as conveying remission of sins to the truly repentant. It is obvious that, at least, it must not be so looked upon, as to do away with altogether, or even to interfere with, the due exercise and proper effects of the ordinance of absolution. The eucharist and absolution cannot both be “for the remission of sins,” in such a sense as to clash, the one with the other. Nor do I remember that there is evidence that the church of England teaches us that the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper was especially instituted for such a purpose. Let me not be misunderstood: I believe that in some most mysterious way, as a seal, a consummation, a perfecting, the holy eucharist is a cleansing of the soul; an assurance of remission; a confirmation of complete and full forgiveness. None can think otherwise who remember Whose that Body is, and Whose that Blood, Which then the penitent receives: but I shrink from a vain trying to ascertain by what means and in what manner, all this is so.¹

It is not to be forgotten that the great commentators

¹ The reader will recollect how the sacrament of baptism has been often spoken of in like manner, if I may say so, as being a partaking of the Body and the Blood of Christ.

from the first ages to the sixteenth century, — S. Ambrose, S. Augustine, S. Jerome, S. Chrysostom, or Theophylact: or again, in later days, de Lyra, and Hugo S. Charo,—do not connect the text in S. Matt. *ch. xxvj. v. 28*, with remission of sins in the sacrament of the eucharist. Nor, a circumstance perhaps which may have its peculiar weight with some persons, does Erasmus in his paraphrase; a work, at one time extensively circulated, under the sanction of high authority, among the people of the English church.

This last author says of the institution of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, commenting upon the verse alluded to; “Wherein the Lorde Jesus, deliuering his body wyllynly vnto death, and shedyng his bloude, went aboue to clense the synnes of the whole worlde, reconclyng vnto God all men frely, whosoeuer wold professe this leage of the newe testamente But leaste so greate a benefyte myghte go out of mennes myndes, or leaste they myght forget the holy leage once entred, and the authoure of theyr healthe also, he dyd institute and ordayne that with often communion of the holy breaude, and of the cup, the memory shuld be renewed amonge the professoures of the euangelicall lawe.”

And, if it be enquired, what then is the object and effect of the eucharist, we shall not be at a loss to answer. Although an assurance of remission were, as it ought not to be, altogether put away from our thoughts, in connexion with that great sacrament, yet how manifold are the blessings of which it is the efficient

cause by the promise of our Lord. Many and infinite, I say, the blessings, even though we dwell not at all upon the Sacrifice and Service which, in and by the holy eucharist, the Church of Christ continually offers to the Almighty Father.² But let us listen to our Church herself.

It is observable, that (as was just observed) the church of England does not specify remission of sins as the end, or even one end and purpose of the eucharist. In earlier times she frequently explained her doctrine on this head. For example: in 1220. “*De effectu eucharistiae.* Vis autem, et virtus, et effectus hujus sacramenti verbis Domini evidenter exprimitur: ‘Hic panis, quem ego dabo vobis, caro mea est, pro mundi vita; caro mea vere est cibus, et sanguis meus vere est potus. Et si quis manducaverit carnem meam, et biberit meum sanguinem, vivet in æternum.’”³ And

² Or, again, the Eucharist is our great giving of thanks: as the very name implies. So, by the way, Lyndwood. “*Eucharistia.* Istud est sacramentum progredientium, unde et viaticum dicitur. Et dicitur eucharistia, ab εὐ quod est *bonum*, et χάρις quod est *gratia*, unde *eucharistia*, i. e. bona gratia, vel gratiarum actio.” *Lib. i. tit. 7. Ignorantia.* On the contrary, baptism is “sacramentum introeuntium.” Confirmation; “pugnantium.” Absolution; “redeuntium.”

So also, in the Homily “concerning the sacrament.” In it, we are told, “this is not esteemed least, to render thanks to Almighty God for all His benefits; . . . the which thing, because we ought chiefly at this Table to solemnize, the godly fathers named it *Eucharistia*: as if they should have said, Now above all other times ye ought to laud and praise God.”

³ Wilkins. *Concilia. tom. i. p. 578.*

so, in many places, at greater length. But we have now to deal rather with later expositions.

The first Book of 1549, following the order of communion of 1548, not only in its exhortation before communion spoke to the people of the “meritorious Cross and Passion, whereby alone we obtain remission of our sins, and are made partakers of the kingdom of heaven ;” but also it went on to say ; “whereof we be assured and ascertained, if we come to the said sacrament with hearty repentance, steadfast faith, *etc.*” This was afterwards removed.⁴

We are now told that “God hath given His Son not only to die for us, but also to be our spiritual food and sustenance in that holy sacrament.” Again ; “that our duty is to receive the communion in remembrance of the sacrifice of His death :” that, “if with a true penitent heart we receive that holy sacrament, then we spiritually eat the Flesh of Christ, and drink His Blood ; then we dwell in Christ, and Christ in us ; we are one with Christ, and Christ with us :” and that “these holy mysteries are ordained, as pledges of His love, to our great and endless comfort.” Here there

⁴ I have been again and again much struck with the circumstance that one or two alterations in the way both of omission and of addition which have been made from the book of 1549, are not to be explained, except by the acknowledgement of the ever superintending hand of God, over the

church of England. It is, to me, questionable whether at the time, namely 1552, the effect of such alterations was either foreseen or meant by man. Take the present instance as an example. The sentence in the text could not have been misunderstood in 1549: after 1552 it might have been.

is not only no mention made of remission of sins as an effect and especial grace of the eucharist, but all persons are moreover warned and exhorted “to come holy and clean to such a heavenly Feast,” to come “in the marriage garment required by God;” to come and “be received as worthy partakers of that holy Table.”

Most true it is that in a spirit of deep humility, we pray to the Father just before the Prayer of Consecration, that we may “so eat the Flesh of His dear Son, Jesus Christ, and drink His Blood, that our sinful bodies may be made clean by His Body, and our souls washed through His most precious Blood.” But this is in that sense, and in that sense only, of which I have already spoken above: a sense in which it cannot contradict, as otherwise perhaps it might, the plain teaching of the Church in other places. A sense also, such as that in which the early Church at Cæsarea prayed at a like time and occasion. “Συ ὁ Θεος ἡμών, . . . καθαρίσον ἡμάς απὸ πάντος μολυσμοῦ σαρκὸς καὶ πνευματοῦ, καὶ διδαξόν ἀγιωσυνῆς ἐπιτελεῖν εν φοβῷ σου.” Or, as in the Syriac liturgy of S. James; “Grant, O Lord, that our bodies may be sanctified by Thy Holy Body, and our souls purified by Thy propitiatory Blood:” or, as in the canon of the old Sarum and Hereford missals; “Domine, sancte Pater, . . . da mihi hoc sacrosanctum corpus et sanguinem ita digne sumere: ut merear per hoc remissionem omnium peccatorum meorum accipere.”

Again, take the catechism: upon the sacrament of

the Lord's Supper. “*Question.* What are the benefits whereof we are partakers thereby? *Answer.* The strengthening and refreshing of our souls by the Body and Blood of Christ, as our bodies are by the Bread and Wine.” Not a word, or an allusion even, of forgiveness of sins.

Once more, the Homilies. “We must be sure to hold, that in the Supper of the Lord, there is no vain ceremony, no bare sign, no untrue figure of a thing absent; *But*, as the scripture saith, *the table of the Lord, . . . the communion of the Body and Blood of the Lord, in a marvellous incorporation, which by the operation of the Holy Ghost (the very bond of our conjunction with Christ) is through faith wrought in the souls of the faithful, whereby not only their souls live to eternal life, but they surely trust to win their bodies a resurrection to immortality.* The true understanding of this fruition and union, . . . the ancient fathers both perceiving themselves, and commanding to their people, were not afraid to call this Supper, some of them, the salve of immortality, and sovereign preservative against death; other, a deifical communion; other, the sweet dainties of our Saviour, the pledge of eternal health, the defence of faith, the hope of the resurrection; other, the food of immortality, the healthful grace, and the conservatory to everlasting life. All which sayings both of the holy Scripture and godly men, truly attributed to this celestial banquet and feast, O how would they inflame our hearts to desire the participation of these mysteries, and often-

times to covet after this bread, continually to thirst for this food!"⁵ It is strange that there should be no mention of forgiveness of sins, as an especial grace conveyed by the holy eucharist, if that forgiveness in its proper meaning be indeed an end and purpose of that sacrament.

I have been led further, perhaps, than is required of me now, in my observations upon the teaching of our Church in this matter. I am nevertheless confident, that on account of its manifest importance, the reader will pardon me, even though I have done no more than offered some suggestions which he can follow on for himself. With regard to the immediate subject of this dissertation, objections based upon the doctrine of "forgiveness of sins" in the eucharist, can not be brought against my interpretation of the three forms of

⁵ The first part of the Sermon concerning the Sacrament.

And I would quote also the apology of bishop Jewell: in which the omission of all reference to remission of sins in the Eucharist is equally to be remarked. "Dixerit pronunciamus in Cœna credentibus vere exhiberi Corpus et Sanguinem Domini, Carnem Filii Dei, vivificantem animas nostras, cibum superne venientem, immortalitatis alimoniam, gratiam, veritatem, vitam: eamque communio nem esse Corporis et Sanguinis Christi, cuius participatione vivificamur, vegetamur, et pascimur ad

immortalitatem, et per quam con jungimur, unimur, et incorporamur Christo, ut nos in illo maneamus, et ille in nobis . . . Eucharistiam esse sacramentum, . . . ut de ejus morte et nostra liberatione gratias agamus, et frequentatione sacramentorum [*sic*] ejus rei memoriam assidue renovemus. Ut vero Christi Corpore et Sanguine alamur, in spem resurrectionis et vitae æternæ, utque pro certissimo habeamus, id esse animis nostris alendis Corpus et Sanguinem Christi, quod alendis corporibus est panis et vinum."

absolution in our Prayer-book, by those who argue, with Wheatly, that such remission is conveyed to sincere penitents by the so called absolutions either of the daily prayers, or of the liturgy. It may, perhaps, be consistently urged by persons who deny or explain away entirely the grace of sacerdotal absolution: by those who would have us believe that the power of the keys—the power of remitting and of retaining sins; the power of loosing and of binding;—is exercised only by promulgating and preaching the gospel, or by administering baptism and the Lord's Supper, and by no other way. But with these I am not now concerned. It is sufficient to know and to repeat that, of whatever value such an argument from the nature and effects of the blessed eucharist may be, it cannot be adopted by those who insist that absolutions following upon “general confessions” convey and seal pardon and remission of sins: unless,—and the assumption is so monstrous that it does not demand refutation,—unless they assert that a general confession and absolution is an essential part of the Service of the eucharist.

Nor must I fail to remark, that whatever comfort and consolation and hope we may derive from the doctrine, if it be indeed true, of remission of sins in the eucharist, as an effect and especial grace of that sacrament, these may be both claimed and admitted by all who deny, with me, that that remission is conveyed by the general absolution. Though we do not forget the remarkable silence on the subject which

has been shown to be observed by our Church, we cannot but remember also how much there is in the fathers which, to say the least, looking that way will make us long hesitate before we reject such hope and comfort altogether. At any rate, in the present condition both of ourselves, the clergy, and of our people, we must not be too hasty in laying out harsh systems of theology: but rather, whilst we are careful never to be lulled into vain hopes and a false security, we may rely upon the general promises of God made to us in holy scripture, and upon reasonable deductions from those promises; more especially if they receive some warrant from the writings of men who lived in purer days; who lived when Christianity was not so widely known as a name more than a reality; who lived when godly discipline was not so relaxed, as to oblige our Church publicly, and for three hundred years vainly, in the hearing of all her people to wish that it might be restored again.

The proofs which may be adduced from the language of our Ordinal are not to be overlooked. In some way, and to some extent, the words “Receive ye the Holy Ghost; whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them, and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained,” must have (as I have said elsewhere) some bearing upon the doctrine of absolution. Were it otherwise, if, that is, they were sounds only and signifying nothing, how strange a mockery, nay, how detestable would be the blasphemy of that language, which idly and without meaning, upon the

solemnity of ordination, dares to repeat those words ! to repeat them, not idly, but deliberately and as communicating power : not as recording some historical truth, that such an authority was once given to the apostles, but as claiming for those who speak the same authority to themselves, the successors of the apostles, and delivering it to whom they will.

Now, without disputing against persons, if there be any, who deny that this part of our Ordinal is to be referred to any exercise of the power of absolution, they, for whom especially these pages are written, will allow as fully as I can myself, that it does relate to that ordinance, and to the forms of absolution in our Common prayer-book. I would have them recollect therefore what the teaching of the church of England was in the sixteenth century, just before the reformation. Then, as now, there were in her service-books general confessions and general absolutions ; then, as now, there was in her ritual a form of absolution after confessions special and distinct. Nor is there any doubt whatever, that in the last case only did the church of England believe, whether clergy or people, that the true power of absolution was actually exercised.

How, at that same period, stood the ancient ordinal ? After some prayers and a proper Preface, the Order for the ordination of priests directed the bishop first to give them authority to consecrate and to bless.

“ *Consecratio manuum sacerdotis.* Consecrare et sanctificare digneris, Domine, manus istas per istam unctionem et nostram benedictionem, ut quæcunque

consecraverint consecrentur, et quæcunque benedixerint benedicantur, et sanctificantur, in nomine Domini nostri, Jesu Christi.”

Then power to offer the sacrifice of the Eucharist.

“ *Accipe potestatem offerre sacrificium Deo, missamque celebrare tam pro vivis quam pro defunctis. In nomine Domini Jesu Christi.*”

After this the holy communion, in which Service (as now) ordinations were performed, was continued, until immediately before the post-communion. Then it was directed ;

“ *Antequam dicatur post-communio, ponat episcopus manus suas super capita singulorum, dicens :*

Accipe Spiritum Sanctum : quorum remiseris peccata, remittuntur eis; et quorum retinueris, retenta erunt.”⁶

The omissions which were made in this part of the Ordinal in 1549 are most observable. The separate delivery of powers to consecrate and bless, and to offer the sacrifice of the Eucharist, was withdrawn : and the office of the priesthood in those respects was committed to the candidate, with imposition of hands, by the words alone ; “ Receive the Holy Ghost.” But express power was given in regard to absolution : “ Whose sins” it was instantly added “ thou dost forgive, they are forgiven, and whose sins thou dost retain, they are retained.” It was not until 1662 that the very proper Form was introduced, “ Receive the

⁶ *Monumenta ritualia. vol. 3. p. 213—220.*

Holy Ghost for the office and work of a priest now committed unto thee by the imposition of our hands."

Was there, I would ask, in the year 1549,—has there ever been since then,—in any alterations of the Ordinal of the church of England, the most remote hint that the priestly power of loosing and binding, of remitting and of retaining, was no longer, as of old, to be exercised in right of this distinct commission? or, again, that it was in future to be exercised according to a wider fashion, and in a totally different manner? no longer, that is, after private and full confession, but by the utterance of the precatory and declaratory public forms retained in the liturgy and in the daily offices?

Great as were some of the alterations then made in the doctrine and in the discipline of the English church, none were greater than this change would have been as to the doctrine of absolution. And yet, not only are people, who assert that a change was made, unable to tell us to what amount exactly the alteration reached, but they cannot prove even an appearance of authoritative change at all. Whilst, on the other hand, we place before them the ritual, the daily prayers, the liturgy, the ordinal, all now continuing the ancient observances of general confessions, and private and particular absolutions, and the ancient commission to forgive sins or to retain them; and we further ask, why are we not to understand and to interpret all according also to the same ancient doctrine?

Even if this clause, in like manner with the others,

had been omitted, so that the form had simply been as settled in 1662, “ Receive the Holy Ghost for the office and work of a priest in the church of God, now committed unto thee by the imposition of our hands,” yet this would have been but a return to an earlier practice, which had prevailed in our Church until about the 11th century. Up to that period the form at ordination of priests did not in particular specify this power of forgiving and of retaining sins. This circumstance could not have been unknown to the revisers of our Ordinal in 1552; and the fact (as I have before remarked) that they retained the clause, coupled with the then known and received doctrine of sacerdotal absolution, is most significant.

Probably some of my readers are aware that a somewhat difficult question is involved in this addition, joined as it anciently was, in the ordinals of the church of England before the reformation, with a second imposition of hands; which second imposition some foreign theologians have pronounced to be *essential*. Into this we need not now enter. I may be excused however, in repeating here (from another work) one observation: that “the true explanation of the difficulty is, that there being inherent in the priestly office power over both the mystical and the eucharistical body of Christ, power, that is, to consecrate the sacred elements of Bread and Wine, and power to rule and to absolve the living members of the Church militant, this power is given entirely and at once by the single imposition of hands. It was very

wise in the revisers of our ordinal not to omit this clause, *Whose sins thou dost forgive*, etc. and it was equally wise and accordant with all ancient precedent both of opinion and practice, by uniting the two forms and restoring the one imposition of hands, to remove doubts and difficulties upon this point.”⁷

And as, upon the one side, we can argue from ancient forms and rites which have been retained in our Church, so, upon the other side, we may derive, at least, illustration from the rejection of the same rites by societies which separated from the Church about the 16th century. For example: the Middelburg “Booke of common prayers, etc.” in 1586, does not pretend in its ordinal, (so to call it) to convey a power to forgive or to retain sins. “The reformed churches” for whose use this Book was drawn up, and by whom it was very largely used not only abroad but in England, did not believe in absolution, in the sense in which the catholic Church has always accepted that term; therefore it would have been idle to have alluded to it in their book for public worship. Their order was this:

“After that, he [the pastor elect] is to be ordained by the laying on of the hands of the eldership of that congregation, and the ministers appointed for that purpose, whereof one is to pronounce these words:— According to this lawful calling, agreeable to the word of God, whereby thou art chosen pastor in the name

⁷ *Ibid. p. 221.*

of God, stand thou charged with the pastoral charge of this people, over which the Holy Ghost hath made thee overseer, to govern this flock of God, which He hath purchased with His blood."

Again, in exactly the same way and for the same reasons, absolution being rejected, the form of ordaining ministers according to John Knox's well known book, afterwards adopted by the kirk of Scotland, makes no claim to the power of forgiving sins. "*Prayer ended, the rest of the ministers, if any be elders of that church, present, in signe of their consent shall take the elected by the hand. The chiefe minister shall give the benediction as followeth.* God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who hath commanded his gospel to be preached to the comfort of his elect, and hath called thee to the office of a watchman ouer his people, multiplie his graces with thee, illuminate thee with his Holy Spirit, comfort and strengthen thee in al vertue, gourne and guide thy ministry to the praise of his holy name, to the propagation of Christ's kingdome, to the comfort of his church, and finally to the plaine discharge and assurance of thy owne conscience, in the day of the Lord Jesus ; to whom, etc."⁸

I shall not delay about any other Books of public prayer of a like kind ; the above will sufficiently shew the purpose for which they have been mentioned. There is one other Book of common-prayer formed

⁸ *Edit.* Edinbvrgh. 1611. 8vo. *Cum privilegio.*

upon the model of our own Book, to which it were much to be wished that reference might be made in this matter of absolution, with the same satisfaction which we can derive from it in some other respects. I speak now of the Prayer-book of the Church in the United States which is in communion with us. To say that she has “ surrendered ” the power of remitting and of retaining left by our Lord to His Church, would be to assert that “ she has cut herself from the Catholic Church of Christ, and therein from Christ Himself.” And the American Church has not surrendered it. In the Preface it is most distinctly declared that “ this Church is far from intending to depart from the church of England in any essential point of doctrine, discipline, or worship.” And in her Ordinal, for priests, she retains the same form at imposition of hands which we use. But there follows, “ *Or this*: Take thou authority to execute the office of a priest in the Church of God, now committed to thee by the imposition of our hands; and be thou a faithful dispenser of the word of God and of His holy sacraments; in the Name, *etc.*”

Now I have already said that this is, to all intents and purposes whatever, a full, sufficient, and valid form. Yet, it would have been well not to have given an option between two forms: not also, as it were, so to have distinguished the two, as to point out, and, by pointing out, to leave apparently indifferent the delivery of this commission. Nor is this all. In the admonition before communion, persons who are troubled

in conscience are desired to come to the minister that they may receive godly counsel and advice; but the words “and the benefit of absolution” are left out. Nor is this all. In the visitation of the sick, there is no order given that the sick man should be “moved to confess,” if he feel the weight of any grievous sin: and the absolution which ought to follow upon such confession is omitted also.

What are we to say to all this? if there is not a “surrender” of the power, and it clearly is not surrendered, has there not been an attempt improperly to check the exercise of it, nay, more, to conceal it? Compare the American book with our own: and what must both priests and people think of alterations such as these? In the Preface it is further said, that by such a comparison the reasons of all changes “will, it is to be hoped, appear.” What reason was there, why the American church should have recommended with a less firm voice than the church of England ever has, the duty, under certain circumstances, of receiving the benefit of absolution, or should not as openly have provided for the fulfilment of it? We may thank God that He has not permitted our church thus to hesitate and give offence: for it is a cause of offence when a branch of the universal Church speaks with a dubious voice: claiming and holding fast upon the one hand, neglecting and hiding upon the other. It may be worldly wisdom to endeavour so to gain an end: it is not, in its proper acceptation, worldly honesty, and it is not most certainly the wisdom of the

Gospel. Nothing can excuse, as it seems to me, even an appearance of prevarication in the statement of chief doctrines of the Faith: we ought to have some means of knowing what all bodies of professing Christians hold, and what they do not hold. Let then the American church speak out: let her tell us, so that no man can misunderstand her, whether she believes the same doctrine of absolution with the church of England and the Church catholic, or, whether she rejects that doctrine with the presbyterian kirk of Scotland, and the protestants abroad.

We will now pass on from this enquiry into the old and modern ordinals of the Church: it is a question which, mixed up as it is with the true doctrine of absolution, could not have been rightly disregarded altogether: and, well considered, there is not a little with which it supplies us towards the object which we have had in view.

It has been objected against my *Visitation Sermon*, that I have there said that a deacon may pronounce the “absolution” at morning and evening prayer: but it was not so. Neither, I hope, would such an assertion be deliberately made by any one, in the face of the rubric “*by the priest, alone.*” My argument was, and I again insist upon it, that we cannot argue, as some will, for any sacerdotal character to be especially attributed to that *absolution*, “solely on account of common practice, and the wording of the rubric.” Because, if it were an argument, we ought equally to conclude that no deacon ought to say the versicles

after the creed, or the beginning of the Service of the holy communion. There is little doubt I suppose that where our Church in her rubrics says priest, she means priest: and also, that it was never contemplated that a deacon should have the charge of a parish, or, alone, should say the daily prayers publicly in the congregation. But many things have been forced upon the Church, contrary to her orders and desire. This permission of the ministry of a deacon is one example: yet not such an one, as that we must of necessity conclude that because deacons do not pronounce this “absolution,” *therefore* the Church herself by the words in the rubric, *the priest, alone*, intended the absolution to be an exercise of “the power of the keys,” and a conveyance of remission of sins to the truly penitent.

And I am borne out in this view of the rubric by an author already cited above, Warner; in his illustration of the Common-prayer. He says: “The word *minister* and the word *priest*, are in this, and other offices, used promiscuously. For if the word *priest*, must necessarily be restrained to mean one in priest’s orders,” [as, I presume, with all submission to Mr. Warner, it necessarily must be,] “then a deacon must not say the part intended for the minister in the versicles after the Lord’s prayer, no, nor the Lord’s prayer itself, nor many other parts of the Liturgy, which are expressly appointed to be said by the *priest*, and yet nobody I believe questions, but what a deacon may say. And indeed in all the common-prayer

books in king Edward's and queen Elizabeth's time, nay, from the first inserting the form of absolution, till after the restoration of king Charles the second, the word *minister* was the word made use of in this rubrick : which shews, that the compilers intended no distinction of orders, but that the people should not join in it. And according to this intention, *in the proceedings of the ecclesiastical commissioners* in 1689, it was determined ‘ that the *absolution* may be red by a deacon, and that the word *priest* in the rubric should be changed into *minister*.’”

Here, being on the subject of objections charged against my *Sermon*, let me observe upon the use which was therein made of the term *sacrament*, as applied to other ordinances and means of grace appointed by our Blessed Lord, than to those only of baptism and the eucharist.

I am not now about to enter into a discussion as to the liberty which the church of England permits of the use of the term, *sacrament*. No one can deny that she does not herself restrict it to the two great ordinances of baptism and the supper of the Lord. She teaches us that those two are sacraments generally necessary to salvation : she teaches us that confirmation, orders, absolution, matrimony, are sacraments, because they are means of spiritual aid and of the conveyance of God's grace to those who desire to receive them : still, not sacraments in the same sense in which baptism and the eucharist alone are. And if we acknowledge that all these ordinances are indeed

means of spiritual aid, by which upon the one part we receive, and upon the other part the Almighty Saviour conveys, His grace, then it is in one respect a very light matter by what term we call them. Then we may well say, as did bishop Andrewes; “the whole matter is a meere λογομαχία: if the thing were agreed upon, we should not strive for the name.”⁹

⁹ Answer to cardinal Perron. xvj.

I do not care to give quotations from individual writers in our Church since the reformation, who have commonly used the term sacrament of other ordinances besides baptism and the eucharist, following the doctrine of the primitive fathers; and for the same reason, *because they are sacraments*. And being sacraments (unless we can be bold enough to say that the church may make them at her will, which would be heresy,) they must all have been instituted and ordained by Christ Himself, either immediately by His own mouth, or, mediately, by the mouth and teaching of His apostles.

The cause why, in later years and under a system of very loose theology, the term sacrament has been (if I may say so) avoided, is, —at least I can find no other cause, —from a misapprehension of that part of the xxvth article, beginning “ Those five commonly called sacraments.” Now, even this clause

does not say they are no longer to be so “commonly called,” but that, whether so called or not, they “have not the like nature of sacraments with baptism and the Lord’s supper; for that they have not any visible sign or ceremony ordained of God.” Whether, if these sacraments had a visible sign ordained of God, they would then have the like nature with baptism or the Lord’s supper, the article does not determine: it states the fact, and draws its conclusion, a very just one, and, as it seems to me, not the only one upon which we can rely, for the great truth that (for example) confirmation and orders are not ordinances having “the like nature of sacraments with baptism and the Lord’s supper.”

No one, I suppose, would pretend to say that this same 25th article is clearly worded. If it were, there would be no disputes about the exact meaning of it. For instance: as to confirmation being “a corrupt following of the apostles.” The practice of it might

But in another respect it involves important consequences: if the thing is not agreed upon, then the

be made to be so; or, if it was held to have the like nature of a sacrament with baptism: but “a corrupt following of the apostles” it cannot possibly be, in any sense which shall contradict the teaching of the Church in her Prayer-book. In that Book, unless confirmation is, as I believe it to be, “an effectual sign of grace, and of God’s good will towards us, by the which He doth work invisibly in us, and doth not only quicken, but also strengthen and confirm our faith in Him”—if, I say, confirmation be not this, it is, as practised in our Church, something worse than a mockery and pretence.

So, also, of absolution: if the Prayer-book teach sound doctrine, and does not play with one of the most awful and solemn ordinances of the holy gospel; if it does not play with and make a jest of the power given to His Church by our Blessed Saviour to remit and to retain sins; if, in a word, the church of England has neither two faces nor a double tongue;—we must not so interpret the 25th article as to make *her* practice of absolution to be “a corrupt following of the apostles.”

That the word “sacraments” even by the article is not limited

to baptism and the eucharist, may perhaps be argued from its own words. “The sacraments were not ordained of Christ to be gazed upon, etc.” We all know against what abuse this was especially directed. But who ever heard of the sacrament of baptism being “gazed upon or carried about?”

Much more weighty in its bearing is the answer in the catechism: “two only, as generally necessary to salvation, etc.” Nor would the church of England have said that Orders is not a sacrament in one and a most true sense no less necessary than baptism or the eucharist: necessary, that is, not to the salvation of any individual, but necessary to the whole Church. I know not that she has ever altered her teaching upon this point, since the time when, in the *Necessary Doctrine*, she declared; “The sacrament of order, although it be not commanded to any particular man as necessary for the attaining of everlasting life, yet in the Church, which is the mystical body of Christ, it hath a necessity, to the intent that by ministers duly placed there may be due spiritual fathers for spiritual generation.” *Formula ries*, p. 293.

name is not so lightly to be used. Nor did I use it lightly : knowing that the ordinances of orders and absolution, for example, are believed by some to be nothing except the very merest, simplest, ceremonies ; —knowing, moreover, that the church of England estimates them much higher and looks on them with a much more mysterious and solemn regard ;—knowing that in the first of these our Church believes that the Holy Ghost is given unto men that they may execute the work of priests in the Church of God ; that in the second, duly received and administered, remission of mortal sin is conveyed and assurance of forgiveness, and a restoring to a state of justification ;—knowing, I say, this, I used and shall continue to use the term, Sacrament, advisedly and with deliberate purpose.

Fully relying, as by the grace of God I do, on the complete truth of the doctrines of the church of England, I employ the word, Sacrament, when writing of such ordinances as absolution, with the same intent and for the same reason, that some persons use the names “rite” and “ceremony” when they speak of Holy Baptism or the Eucharist. They are consistent, and so, I trust, am I also. They use those terms, because, denying the great gift of spiritual regeneration, and of spiritual sustenance by the eating the Flesh of Christ and by the drinking His Blood, they deny also in every real sense those ordinances to be anything beyond “rites” and “ceremonies.” I use the term sacrament, of absolution, because, accepting the teaching of the church of England, I believe that an ordi-

nance which conveys remission of mortal sins, must be, and ought in reason to be called, something far beyond a ceremony or rite.

It is not well to pass over, without any remark at all, the xvith of the 39 articles, *Of sin after baptism*. As it now is in the English version, it does not seem to me that any argument for or against can be based on it, towards determining the sense of the church of England upon the doctrine of absolution. We need not touch upon the clauses which were distinctly directed against the heresy of the Lutherans that justification, *gratia data*, cannot be lost except faith be lost also; or of the Calvinists that it absolutely is not to be lost at all by those who, being among the elect, have once received it. As to the remainder of the article, if it was not directed against a heresy which, something like that of the Novatians of old, refused hope of forgiveness by God to those who should sin wilfully after baptism,—and I do not remember that this was a heresy of the sixteenth century,—it appears as it stands in the English and in the common acceptation of the term “repentance,” to be little more than a simple enunciation of undeniable truths. No one would pretend that every deadly sin after baptism is the sin in its nature unpardonable, the sin against the Holy Ghost; or, if he listens to the dictates of natural reason confirmed as they are by the obvious meaning of numberless passages in Scripture, would assert that baptized men may not repent after the commission of wilful sin.

But, when we turn to the Latin text of the articles

and, if we can do so, throw ourselves back into the times when they were agreed upon, remembering the opinions and common language of those days also, we may see this 16th article under another aspect. I do not say that it *must* be, but that it rightly *may* be, so looked upon. And if it may, then, remembering no less the wild enthusiasm of that age, we shall find that there was ample cause why such an article should be included with the rest. Then the terms “peccatum mortale” as opposed to *veniale*, “irremissible,” “lapsis a baptismō,” “locus poenitentiæ,”¹⁰ “a gratia recedere,” “resipiscētibus,” begin to have a fixed meaning, and we can establish for the whole of the article a sufficient aim and object.

“*De lapsis post baptismum.* Non omne peccatum mortale post baptismum voluntarie perpetratum est peccatum in Spiritum Sanctum, et irremissible: proinde lapsis a baptismō in peccata, locus pœnitentiæ non est negandus. Post acceptum Spiritum Sanctum possumus a gratia data recedere, atque peccare, de nuoque per gratiam Dei resurgere, ac resipiscere: ideoque illi damnandi sunt, qui se, quamdiu hic vivant, amplius non posse peccare affirmant, aut vere resipiscētibus pœnitentiæ locum denegant.”

The articles of 1552 added to this, then the 15th, another concerning the exact nature of the unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost: but this does not bear upon the point before us. It is more to the pur-

¹⁰ “The place for penitentes.” 1552.

pose to observe, that in the year 1571, the edition published after the articles had received also the authority and sanction of parliament altered the last clause from *pœnitentiæ locum* into *venie locum dengant*.

I repeat that I do not wish to insist upon this article strongly as having been evidently intended, at the time when it was drawn up, to have reference to remission of sins by penance, *pœnitentia*: but it certainly, that is the Latin, does come in by way of illustration to confirm the doctrine of the church of England in other formularies.

It is moreover to be remembered that the Latin is the language in which the articles were originally settled and subscribed; the English version, though afterwards also in like manner subscribed, is yet a translation only and so far of inferior value. Inferior, I mean, in the case of doubtful words or terms: to determine which we are in duty bound to appeal to the Latin. Thus, the present instance of “repentance” in the xijth article: and, again, “prayer unto God” in the xxvijth. And if we can learn the signification in which such terms as “vis divinæ invocationis” with respect to baptism, or, “locus pœnitentiæ” with respect to the commission of sins after baptism, were at that time, 1562, accepted and allowed by theologians, it is common sense to say nothing of common fairness to interpret the English, which is a version of the Latin, according to that signification.

Hence, also, we can understand better such enquiries

as that in the visitation articles of Edward the Sixth, in 1550 ; “ Whether any saith that Christian men cannot be allowed to repentance, if they sin voluntary after baptism ? ” And, again, the enquiry made by archbishop Parker in 1567, and already quoted above ;¹¹ “ Do any affirm and maintain that mortal or voluntary sins committed after baptisme, be not remissible by penance ? ”

One word, also, in this place upon the doctrine that in order to receive the grace of sacerdotal absolution, it is necessary that all sins, which are upon the conscience, should be confessed : or, to put it otherwise, that a priest in the due exercise of the power of the keys cannot remit one sin only, leaving another unconfessed and therefore unremitted.

I have carefully avoided in this dissertation reference to the schoolmen : it did not seem to be required, on the present occasion, to complete the proof of the doctrine of the church of England. But on this particular of our subject, we may turn (and I think with profit) to the Summa of Aquinas : nor, regarding a point upon which it is scarcely reasonable to doubt, according to the analogy of the rest of God’s dealings with mankind, will the reader wish to be burthened with any discussion.

The question of Aquinas is : “ *Utrum possit per pœnitentiam unum peccatum sine alio remitti?* ” And before he gives his own judgement, he quotes the fol-

¹¹ *P.* 133.

lowing from a work long attributed to S. Augustine, but now generally acknowledged to be by some other hand ; namely, the *De vera et falsa pœnitentia*. It is an argument, however, to the purpose, so I extract it also : “ [de pœnit. cap. vj.] Sunt plures, quos pœnitet peccasse, sed, non omnino, reservantes sibi quædam, in quibus delectantur : non animadvertentes, Dominum simul mutum et surdum a dæmonio liberasse, per hoc docens, nos nunquam, nisi de omnibus, sanari.” Aquinas proceeds. “ ¶ Respondeo dicendum, quod impossibile est, per pœnitentiam unum peccatum sine alio remitti. *Primo* quidem, quia peccatum remittitur, inquantum tollitur Dei offensa per gratiam. Unde in secunda parte [qu. 109. a. vij.] habitum est, quod nullum peccatum potest remitti sine gratia : omne autem peccatum mortale contrariatur gratiæ, et excludit eam. Unde impossibile est, quod unum peccatum sine alio remittatur. *Secundo*, quia peccatum mortale non potest sine vera pœnitentia remitti, ad quam pertinet deserere peccatum, inquantum est contra Deum, quod quidem est commune omnibus peccatis mortaliibus : ubi autem est eadem causa, et idem effectus. Unde non potest esse vere pœnitens, qui de uno peccato pœnit, et non de alio. Si enim displiceret ei illud peccatum, quia est contra Deum super omnia dilectum (quod requiritur ad rationem veræ pœnitentiæ) sequeretur, quod de omnibus peccatis pœniteret. Unde sequitur, quod impossibile sit, unum peccatum per pœnitentiam remitti sine alio. *Tertio*, quia hoc esset contra perfectionem misericordiæ Dei, cuius per-

fecta sunt opera, unde ejus miseretur, totaliter miseretur : et hoc est, quod August. dicit, in lib. de poenitentia : *Quædam impietas infidelitatis est ab illo, qui justus, et justitia est, dimidiam sperare veniam.*”¹²

Hence we see the reason why the absolution in our visitation office, following upon a special confession, has these words ; “ I absolve thee from all thy sins :” after the example of and to the same effect as the more particular form in the earlier ritual quoted above : “ *Absolvo te ab omnibus peccatis tuis, de quibus corde contritus et ore mihi confessus es : et ab omnibus aliis peccatis tuis de quibus si tuæ occurrent memoriæ confiteri velles.*” And, moreover, the rubric which precedes is framed upon the acknowledgement of the same truth : if the sick man feel his conscience troubled with any weighty matter, he shall be moved “ to make a special confession of his sins :” not of that particular weighty matter, or matters, alone. “ After which confession,” only, the priest shall venture to absolve him.

We will now sum up the contents of the preceding pages, the main purpose of which has been to establish the true interpretation which we ought to put upon the three Forms of absolution in our Common Prayer-book ; and in that interpretation is involved

¹² Summa. pars. III. qu. lxxxvi. art. 3.

the doctrine also upon absolution which the church of England holds.

I have endeavoured to accomplish this, first, by showing the extraordinary variety of opinions upon the subject, which have been produced and defended by our chief ritualists, from the time of bishop Overal to the present day : not one of whom (a circumstance no less extraordinary) has attempted to support his view by any consistent or continued reference to the dogmatic and authoritative formularies, articles, or canons of the English church. Secondly ; an appeal has been at last made to those formularies ; the canons and constitutions of diocesan and provincial councils from the 13th to the 16th century have been brought forward, and confirmed by the concurrent testimony of our greatest canonists, Lyndwood, John de Athon, Hostiensis, the Pupilla oculi, and the Manipulus curatorum. From these works and original documents, we have obtained a clear and precise statement of doctrine concerning the ordinance or sacrament of absolution. Thirdly ; I extracted from the ancient service-books, adopted by our Church before the reformation, the several forms of absolution in the daily office, the liturgy, and the ritual, which correspond with the forms retained by us now ; and they were explained in strict accordance with the received and established doctrine. Fourthly : the differences and alterations, whether by omission or addition, in those forms, which took place during the 16th and 17th centuries, were traced and examined, and, in the same

manner as before, the changes made in the doctrine of absolution were also searched out and insisted on. Fifthly, I laid before the reader extracts from the works of English divines, with a few further observations as we went on, confirming all these by the authority of fathers in the early Church: and, lastly, some two or three questions have been briefly discussed, which bear upon and illustrate the whole subject.

Am I not therefore entitled, at least, to ask for a patient, calm, and (if it may be) unprejudiced consideration of the correctness of that interpretation which, as it appears to me, the three forms of absolution in our prayer-book can, justly, alone bear? Probably, there are many errors in the foregoing pages; errors of fact, of inference, of citation, of omission: they are not wilful, neither have they been caused,—and here I speak earnestly,—by the most distant wish to influence improperly the fair and honest decision at which we all desire to arrive. May God grant that the truth of the whole matter shall, in some way or other, be both proved and recognized. Personal pride and the poor selfish ambition of being able by subtle reasoning or clever objections still to hold fast by some declaration formerly made of individual opinion, are not to be listened to for one instant in any case whatever against the voice of Truth: and if this be so, always, in common concerns even of the world, how much more in the determination of those questions which, involving the salvation of souls, depend upon the one meaning of the

Inspired Word of God and the declared consent of His Church.

Let then all errors of fact be pointed out, and they shall readily be withdrawn ; let it be shewn how far they have served to establish the conclusion which has been in view, and how far, in consequence, that conclusion is weakened through want of their support ; let the conclusion itself be shewn to be altogether erroneous and incorrect : and then, besides all this, let some other interpretation of the three forms, and some other exposition of the doctrine of absolution be produced and proved : proved,—not by mere argument alone ; not by its adaptation to the principles and wishes and practice of the present day ; not by its accordance with modern opinions, however widely spread ;—but, much more, by the authoritative documents, and by the reasonable construction which we ought to give to the language, of the Church of England.

Many arguments also will probably be urged against my positions : against all ; against some in particular. It is my duty to expect them, and (if it may be) to answer them. God forbid that I should fancy that the expression of my judgement should go far in the decision of a question of such vital consequence as is the question of sacerdotal absolution : were it so in the case of any man, he would hesitate to put pen to paper. If the doctrine of the church of England be indeed doubtful upon this point,—and doubtful I cannot conceive it to be,—then I humbly offer all that I

have said as materials towards discussion. For many a year we have neglected enquiry about sacerdotal absolution altogether. Is it a truth of the Gospel, or is it a fiction and pretence? Whatever it is, let us try to settle it.

CHAPTER X.

EFORE we conclude, I have yet to offer one or two more remarks ; together with the suggestion of some difficulties which, if I am not mistaken, lie against such an explanation of the two forms of general confession and absolution as would represent them to be an effectual conveyance of remission of sins.

It has been often repeated that the church of England, in all matters of faith, now holds and teaches the same doctrines which she held and taught in the year 1560, unless after that time we can find some change or modification in her formularies ; such as the xxxix articles, the canons of 1604, or the prayer-book of 1662. Is there any evidence at all of change since 1560 regarding absolution ? and, if not, what must have been the result of an examination made by a clergyman in that year of the alterations regarding the same doctrine, since 1545 ? Fifteen years is no large space of time : some hundreds of clergy, who were living in the first year of queen Elizabeth, had been ordained before the death of king Henry the eighth. It was a period also of excitement ; novel

opinions of all sorts were abroad, and on every side enthusiasts eager to recommend their several peculiar fancies. Neither was there any lack of opportunity for forcing these, each in its turn, prominently before the notice of persons who then ruled over our Church. At such a time men do not sit idle or unconcerned ; and it would be monstrous to suppose that the English clergy did not watch narrowly every alteration debated and resolved upon in the convocations, and that they were not well assured that every word in which the decisions were published to the world had been well weighed and deliberately chosen. Hence, it would of necessity follow that whilst, upon the one hand, they accepted and recognized the full propriety of the reformations which were made both in doctrine and practice, they would, upon the other hand, justly conclude that all that was not altered was to be retained. To be retained, I would add, according to the established and precise theological teaching of the Church for centuries before.

It is not easy to discover in what way, and upon what grounds, any sensible person whether lay or clergy could have learnt that in 1560 he was to believe that he might obtain the benefit of priestly absolution after only a general confession, and that a distinct oral confession in order to such an absolution was no longer to be required, or thought to be essential. He would demand ; Where has the church of England told me this ? and we must still make the like demand.

Or, apply the same line of argument for an instant

to another modern explanation of the doctrine of absolution.

In 1560, after 15 years of diligent and repeated enquiry, after most distinct alterations had been settled, by the reformation of abuse, in more than one chief article of the Christian faith, the church of England still openly retained a form of special absolution of the penitent in her ritual ; still urged all to confess whose consciences might be troubled with grievous sin ; still offered them absolution ; and still gave to her priests, in the same words as of old, the power to forgive and to retain, to bind and to loose. If, therefore, this term “absolution” in the liturgy or the ritual, was to be understood to mean, and to mean nothing more than, a preaching of the promises of God or a particular application of them to particular cases ; or, again, if the power to forgive and to retain, to bind and to loose, was to be understood as to be exercised in future only in the administration of the sacraments of baptism and the eucharist ; then I do assert that there is no fact in the history of any branch of the catholic church of Christ in any age so startling, so utterly opposed to the spirit of the Gospel, as that fact must have been. For it would have been nothing less than a deceiving of men ; it would have been, to all appearance, a leaving, nay, more, a persisting in the use of an old term and of an old ordinance, when in reality the one was to be taken in a totally new sense, and the other utterly put a stop to, without a single word of explanation. I cannot believe it.

We must not forget, moreover, that the people and clergy of the church of England in the reign of king Edward the sixth, were well aware of all that was being done and written by the reformers abroad. Communications were frequent, and not only before 1552, but, after queen Mary's death, until the end of the century, constant efforts were being made by violent partizans to force upon our Church the acceptance of many opinions which had been promulgated at Geneva, or Frankfort, or Zurich.

But, by God's mercy, the English convocations firmly and constantly resisted. On whatever great names defended, on whatever high authority supported, still the great test by which all doctrines were then tried among ourselves, at home, was Scripture interpreted by catholic tradition. This was the fire (if I may so say) through which all that we have retained was passed; and which in like manner destroyed the dry and fantastic notions which from time to time men sought to introduce.

Let us remember all this: and then remember also the assertions of Calvin, of Bucer, and Zuingle, regarding this very question of sacerdotal absolution.¹

¹ Take one of these, the chiefest, for example; Calvin in his Institutes. “Evidem scio aliud communiter receptum esse, pœnitentiae et clavium beneficio nos obtinere post baptismum remissionem, quæ prima regeneratione

per solum baptismum nobis datur.” I do not at all pretend to understand what Calvin meant by these last words about regeneration in baptism. But to continue. “Sed qui hoc comminiscuntur in eo errant quod non cogitant potes-

And then, once more, let us call to mind the deliberate decision of the church of England, at the beginning of the succeeding century, when the whirlwind, during which she had stood so firm, had somewhat passed away; when during a space of some forty years or more, she had had time calmly to contemplate the changes, and had proved, by experience, the reformations she had made. “The abuse of a thing doth not take away the lawful use of it. Nay, so far was it from the purpose of the church of England to forsake and reject the churches of Italy, France, Spain, Germany, or any such like churches, in all things which they held and practised, that it doth with reverence retain those ceremonies, which do neither endamage the church of God, nor offend the minds of sober men; and only departed from them in those particular points, wherein they were fallen both from

tatem clavium, de qua loquuntur, a baptismo sic pendere ut nullo modo separari debeat. Remissionem accipit peccator ecclesiæ ministerio, nempe non sine evangelii prædicatione. Qualis autem illa est? Nos sanguine Christi emundari a peccatis. Atqui lavari illius signum ac testimonium quid est nisi baptismus? Videamus igitur ut ad baptismum absolutio illa referatur.” *Lib. 4. cap. xv. §. 4.*

Again: “Ne tamen animos tollant, quacunque in parte sacramentum posuerint, nego jure haberi

pro sacramento. Primum quod nulla Dei promissio singularis ad hanc rem extet, unica sacramenti hypostatis.” By the way, our homilies assert that *absolution hath the promise of forgiveness of sin.* “Deinde quod quæcumque hic cæremonia proferatur, merum sit hominum inventum . . . Aptissime itaque dixeris si baptismum vocaveris pœnitentiae sacramentum, quum in confirmationem gratiæ et fiduciæ sigillum iis datus sit qui pœnitentiam meditantur.” *Cap. xix. §. 17.*

themselves in their ancient integrity, and from the apostolical churches, which were their first founders." Shall we venture to think, whilst this was the language of our Church about comparatively matters of indifference, about mere rites and outward ceremonies, that she would have spoken otherwise of ordinances and sacraments of the Gospel?

There is one consideration which has weighed heavily upon me, urging as it does the very great importance of the enquiry on which we have been engaged, and, if I may say so, obliging me to speak plainly what seems to be the truth. It is this: if my interpretation of the forms of absolution be correct, then, first to say that absolution is an ordinance of God given to His Church by which men may obtain forgiveness of their sins, and, secondly, to teach people, or to suffer them to be taught, that they can, if truly penitent, obtain this especial grace in and by means of the general public forms of the daily office and the liturgy,—all this is a keeping up and a promoting of error, delusion, and mockery. So far as I can learn from the decisions of our Church, she not only does not assert anything of the kind, but she does declare just the contrary. Better is it, because less dangerous, to deny or to explain away altogether the grace of the sacrament of absolution, than to admit and to insist upon it, speaking peace where there is no peace, and sending our people to wells where there is no water.

This, however, is a consideration to which due weight must be allowed, equally, under another as-

pect. If my view of this whole matter be incorrect, if it be not (after all) the sound teaching of the church of England, then, (let me own it) first in bringing it so prominently forward, and, secondly, in the vain attempt to establish and confirm it by documentary evidence and proof, I have been so very wrong, that I must prepare to meet, as I deserve to receive, every mark of condemnation. To shut up true channels of spiritual gifts, and to propose to put limits upon the means by which the grace of Christ comes to us, other and stricter than those laid down by His Church, cannot be less dangerous, cannot be worse, than to dare to open or enlarge them in ways which are not His ways, and after our imaginations instead of His word.

Something has been already said above, upon the reasonable conclusion, which seems inevitably to follow from the commissions given by our Blessed Lord to His Church: to retain *and* remit; to bind *and* to loose; hence that it is a judicial authority, and that they who seek for the blessing must not refuse to acknowledge also a power, if it be required, in the same hands to withhold it. I allude to this now, as well worth the attentive regard of all who, taking Wheatley's explanation, assert that the priest exercises the power of the keys by the absolutions which follow after the public general confessions, and then conveys to the true penitent remission of sins. For if this be so, the constant tradition of the catholic Church is not to be listened to, and the commission given was not judicial.

According to Wheatly, those persons who have committed deadly, wilful, sins, and have repented of their sins, come into the church in a state obnoxious to the wrath of God, with those sins unforgiven. If they do not so come to church, if in any other way they have been restored already to God's favour and to a state of justification, then I have no further controversy either with Wheatly or his followers: because then the general absolutions do not convey remission and we agree together. But he says that they do convey. We return therefore to the penitent sinner, entering the church. How long ago his sin or sins may have been committed, how much and how deeply soever he may have repented, how earnestly soever he may have prayed, how tearfully confessed—all this *he* knows, and no one else: and, in his own mind he thinks; “I have done enough, I now go to be absolved.” Now, what is this, what can it be, but to say, as it were, to the priest, “Loose me, unbind me, forgive my sins, you may and shall: bind me, you shall not.”

I have frequently repeated in this dissertation that the church of England does not teach now the grace of absolution to be of necessity to salvation. Wheatly's view is in contradiction to this truth. For if the public general absolutions do always, as he asserts, convey to the truly penitent pardon and remission, it is difficult to apprehend, unless people seldom go to church, how sins are forgiven ordinarily by Almighty God in any other way. To this we may add, that if such a doctrine of absolution be indeed the doctrine of our

Church, then I suppose there can be no doubt that she speaks the truth, and, therefore, these public forms are, as some say they are, certain means of grace. But, in that case, the church of England by placing them in her daily offices and in the liturgy would compel all persons who cannot consent to so strange a teaching to reject continually, day after day perhaps and in a very positive manner, great gifts not simply offered to them by God, but, as it were, thrust upon their acceptance by His Church.

How inconsistent, moreover, would such teaching be: telling us as plainly as possible upon the one hand that sacerdotal absolution is not necessary, because God may forgive our sins if we sincerely repent, in some other way secret to us, but yet we trust as sure: and, upon the other hand, never permitting her people to assemble for the daily office or the holy communion without conveying this pardon and remission of their sins to all who are truly penitent by this very means, and by no other, of sacerdotal absolution.

But it may be answered, there is no forcing (so to speak) of this absolution upon those who are unwilling to receive it: each person is to appropriate it to himself according as he is desirous of its benefits, and according to the sincerity and completeness of his repentance. Now, not to mention how unlike to the whole system of the Christian faith, this careless scattering, this sowing broad-cast, of chief gifts of God must be,—to be accepted; to be rejected; to be shrunk

from ;—put it how one will, it results at last in each man being both his own judge and his own priest. He has had sin, many sins perhaps, upon his conscience: he has long repented of them, long prayed, confessed, and inwardly resolved: at length he fixes on a certain day upon which he decides that he may at last, in faith, listen to the absolution “as a conveyance and sealing to him of pardon *at that very instant* through the priest’s ministration.” I say, in faith: for I presume that this great grace of God, being no less than pardon and remission of sins, does require (and strictly too) faith: or, let us sink its demand to some far lower quality, a reasonable hope. Really this is the veriest example, if it be true, of an *opus operatum* that ever was thought of. And how is any man to know, when he has fixed on one day, in a given month, for this pardon “to be conveyed and sealed to him,” that he may not be a month too soon, and that, what he himself trusts is a sincere and complete repentance is not so, after all?

Let no one think that what has just been said is an exaggeration or a misrepresenting of the consequences of such a theory as Wheatly’s, until he has realized to himself what the real grace of absolution is; namely, as that author correctly says, “a pardon conveyed and sealed to the penitent through the ministry of the priest.” If the effects of the general public absolutions be anything less than or different from this, then I do not care to dispute what those effects may be, because they are not the especial grace of God given by

Him to man through His appointed means of sacerdotal absolution.² In opposition to the difficulties and the inconsistencies of Wheatly's theory, how plain and simple, how intelligible and accordant with scripture is the constant teaching of the church of England. On the one hand, offering to all her people the grace of sacerdotal absolution, if, having troubled and unquiet consciences, they seek for it in the right way : on the other, permitting them to hope that this method is not the only one by which they may obtain pardon of sin committed after baptism. And in her public offices, she authoritatively declares this truth, pronouncing it to those present, that God “ pardonest and absolveth all them that truly repent, and unfeignedly believe His holy Gospel :”—again, in her liturgy, she prays most devoutly that God will have mercy upon His repentant children ; that He will pardon and deliver them from all their sins ; confirm and strengthen them in all goodness ; and bring them to everlasting life :—lastly, exhorting all who cannot quiet

² I may here remark besides, that to argue from the terms of the two general confessions, from the fulness of the one as compared with the greater vagueness of the other, is, in fact, to allow my interpretation. I have a right to say to all objectors ; “ fix upon your interpretation and the reasons of it. Say, either, that each of the three absolutions is equally an exercise of the power of the

keys, and equally conveys grace ; or, say that the second is of more efficacy than the first, because the confession is more humble and particular, and that as is the confession so must be the forgiveness ; or, deny altogether the grace of sacerdotal absolution ;— but, fix upon one of these or any other that you like. You will find, upon examination, that you cannot consistently argue from more than one.”

their own consciences to use the means which God has of His infinite goodness given, she provides those means before the sight of all men, and commands her ministers duly and fitly to apply them.³

I have, now, only a few words more to say. In the sermon which I preached at Totnes, and in this present dissertation, my aim has been to do what seems to be a bounden duty: that is, to endeavour, humbly but earnestly, to prove that whilst our Church insists on nothing, as of necessity to salvation, which is not to be found in scripture or can be proved thereby, yet no less now than in former ages, she offers to her people all requisite means of grace and spiritual aid.

Will it be said that all this is not required? Would that it indeed were uncalled for labour. But, without arguing the question, let us ask whether our people,

³ An inconsistency may be remarked in a note, which, on Wheatly's notion, I do not pretend to explain. The exhortation in the notice of communion says to all who are unquiet in conscience; "Come and receive the benefit of absolution." Now, granting that there is any grace at all in sacerdotal absolution, a grace conveying pardon, a grace beyond the preaching of God's mercy in particular to the penitent, what can this exhortation, in seriousness, mean? If the forms are alike in their effects, one has been already "pronounced" at

morning prayer: a second *must* be in the celebration of the eucharist about to take place: and yet we hear the call, "Come to me, and receive the benefit of absolution." If this can give no more than the general forms convey and seal, no more grace, no more assurance, is it not a mere playing and jesting with people, so solemnly to urge them to "come?" To come for something which they can obtain and apply to themselves just as well, any day and twice, perhaps, every day, without "coming" at all.

as a people, value the blessed sacraments of Christ's holy Gospel? do they regard baptism and the eucharist as generally necessary to their salvation? necessary, so that, where they can be had, spiritual life and immortality cannot begin without the one, nor continue without the other. Why is this? is it in spite of the constant and honest and open teaching of a learned clergy, enforcing and explaining the doctrines of the Christian Faith? is it in spite of a clergy not neglecting to learn for themselves first, and afterwards not fearing to speak, the great truths held by the church of England?

A Church without dogmatic theology is a fiction and a shadow. Upon all chief questions, especially those which concern our salvation by the proper use of holy sacraments, every Church, claiming the name at least, must have some documents from which, when rightly appealed to, her judgement shall be learnt. Take this question of absolution. Put it upon its lowest grounds: say, that the church of England has declared it to be, in fact, nothing: to be but a preaching of the Word of God, or administration of baptism and the Lord's supper. Must that doctrine be held? If not, must the doctrine advocated in the preceding pages? if neither, where does the exact doctrine lie between the two?

We live in times of enquiry, of controversy, of doubt, and cavil: they who, from whatever circumstance, take a part and interest in the strife more than a mere looking on, must be prepared to meet

with opposition, with contempt perhaps and rebuke. Their reward must be, an inward hope that no unworthy motive has been mixed up with what they have done, and that their chief object has been, even though themselves mistaken, at least to promote the honour and glory of God, and to establish the true doctrines taught by His Church.

Against one thing we must be especially guarded : namely, against any attempt to make systems for ourselves, by taking what we like, and refusing the rest : if we adopt a course so contemptible, we shall certainly not be able to resist the gainsayer, and we shall scarcely be more likely to satisfy ourselves. The question in all subjects which relate to God and to eternity, is not what we like, but what is true : if we remember that, we shall not be so ready (as we often are) to set up authorities one minute, and throw them down the next : nor shall we have “ gods many and lords many” among us ; first this one and then that ; but we shall turn in faith and obedience to the only fountain of Divine Truth ; that is, to the revealed Word of the Most High God, and the voice of His Church.

We shall be very much mistaken,—let me say another word on this,—if we presume that we may hold a single great doctrine of the gospel and be at liberty to accept or not, as we think it agreeable, other doctrines which rest upon precisely the like foundation, and which are supported by the like kind of evidence. For example ; it is mere idle talk to insist

upon the truths of regeneration in holy baptism, or of eating the Flesh of Christ and drinking His Blood in the eucharist, or of the apostolical succession of bishops and priests always in the Church, unless we are prepared to believe and to teach other truths of the same one great chain of doctrine, no less important whether in regard of faith or practice. As a matter of mere argument and speculation, rather than of reality, we may perhaps select this one and not that: may (so to speak) pick and choose: far otherwise, however, if we remember what we are doing; if we can but bring ourselves to the conviction that we are not disputing and enquiring about dialectical subtleties, but about the deep things of God; about His dealings with sinful and fallen man; about eternity; about the application of the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God, God Himself, to the soul and body of each member of the Church; about questions which, dispute as long as we will, are, in some one sense and meaning, true independent utterly of us, and only in that one sense are true.

The spiritual life is as real as our earthly. Having been new-born in baptism, and at that time made children of God even as by our natural birth we are children of men, we must, whether we would have it so or not, if we would be saved at last, go on and grow. We must grow in heavenly strength, and power, and capability. This encrease comes to us, not of ourselves alone or by our own efforts, but in God's sacraments, the means of grace and aid which

He has appointed. If we encrease, then we are subject to no decay: no, strictly not even in our bodies, for they die only in order to immortality. That which is sown is not quickened, except it die. But if this growth be checked, or marred, or stayed, then we must seek for remedies: as the earthly body is helped in sickness and disease by medicine, and restored to its full powers again by bread and wine.

It is a ready charge to make against any man,—brought generally by those who have little else to object,—that he is teaching Romish error; it is a scandalous and detestable charge unless it can be clearly proved, because it is a cry for the multitude, a cry which the ignorant and the enthusiastic catch at, and repeat; it is a charge which no clergyman should make against another, unless he is prepared as the case may be to support or to retract it. I have been thus accused.

Yet, when this charge is brought, some sources of support exist: to say that they remove all pain and anxiety would be to reject proudly what God may perhaps have sent as trial and discipline: still they suggest patience and give comfort. Such, for example, as to remember, that it is, and for three centuries has been, an easy and a vulgar charge: that it was made against men in whose footsteps none need be ashamed to tread, against archbishops Parker, and Whitgift, Laud and Sancroft; against bishops Cooper, Andrewes, Overal, and Montagu, White, Morton, Bramhall, Bull, Pearson, and Ken; against Hooker,

and Field, and Hammond. Or, again, to feel that it is most false : to be assured, if I know myself, that I have never doubted for one instant as to the position of the church of England in the dispensations of God's providence ; that I have ever firmly believed her to be a sound and true branch of the One Holy Catholic Church, in which the word of God is preached, and the sacraments duly administered ; that I both comprehend and acknowledge how, in many points, the church of Rome has grievously departed from the pure faith and practice of the gospel ; and that it would be a most base and sinful thing to introduce,—whether openly or by stealth it matters not,—as doctrines of the church of England, errors which she has herself distinctly repudiated and disowned, but errors, nevertheless, still held by the church of Rome. Or, once more, it is a consolation to remember, that at least I have endeavoured to speak plainly what I suppose to be the truth : and, whilst I would not shrink, and never have shrunk, when occasion calls for it, from pointing out and from opposing erroneous doctrines by whomsoever taught, yet that I have never pandered to the desires of those who can see Rome in almost every article of the Faith ; nor feared, be the cost what it might, to uphold to its full and reasonable extent, the holy and catholic teaching of the church of England.

Supplement.

SUPPLEMENT.

HE preceding Dissertation was directed especially to one object, namely, to the right interpretation which we ought to put upon the forms of absolution in our Common-prayer book. I avoided, therefore, mixing up with that enquiry more than was required for the purpose immediately in hand. But there are two or three other particulars which will excuse, I trust, some brief remarks by way of a supplement.

It has been well and truly said of the power of absolution that “it is a power which the Church has ever thankfully acknowledged to have been given to her by her Divine Head, and which no particular Church can ever surrender, without cutting itself from the Catholic Church of Christ, and therein from Christ Himself.” In reply to this it has been asked, as if it were an irrefragable objection; “How is it that, if the priesthood possess this ‘power of absolution,’ it was *never exercised for the first twelve centuries that succeeded the apostolic times?*” Never exercised, we are told, because “during this whole period, the form that

was exclusively used was *precatory* or *optative*." And we are further told, that it is so clear that "a prayer for a blessing, or an expression of a desire for it, is inconsistent with the notion that he who uses that form does himself give it," that no one "need stop to prove it." But, with submission, I must be allowed to say that this is rather a rapid mode of settling a question upon which much by very learned men has already been written.

If I understand the objection, it does not stop short of a denial that the church of England now exercises in any way, or by any form, the power of absolution. This is a statement which I shall leave others, who think it worth while, to contend against, for the present work throughout is addressed only to persons who accept and believe the doctrine that our Church not merely claims but really and duly exercises "the power of absolution." But it will be well to enquire a little into the extent of the consequences of this change, if it was made, of a *precatory* or an *optative* form into an *indicative* form.

Morinus, one of the most learned men of his age, examined this question at much length, in his elaborate work on the sacrament of penance; and from him, who almost exhausted the sources of information about it, later writers have been contented to take the grounds of their arguments. Before I pass on to his statements, I must observe, that the great author to whom such objectors (as I have spoken of) are indebted for the proofs of the reality of their objection,

did not himself conceive that the facts upon which he insisted, interfered even in the most remote degree, with the full, complete, and constant exercise of the power of absolution by the Church, during the first twelve, as well as during the last six, centuries of the Faith. It is, therefore, to say the least, somewhat curious to find the whole question not only quietly decided against the deliberate judgement of the best writer on the subject, but decided as if not worth the trouble of examination. However, until I see proofs to the contrary, I am satisfied to err in this particular with Morinus, and to believe that even if for twelve hundred years, the forms of absolution in the western Church were, as he asserts they were, precatory and optative, yet that nevertheless the power of absolution was as fully exercised and claimed by the Church then as now, and the grace of that sacrament as completely and entirely conveyed to the penitent and faithful recipient.

For the real question, as every one unprejudiced must see, is not in what words the remission of sin was conveyed by the ministry of the priest, but whether such an ordinance as *pænitentia*, or absolution, was or was not believed by the Catholic Church for the first 1200 years to be an ordinance of our Blessed Lord. If it was not so believed,—and this is the conclusion which we are desired to arrive at, because for 1200 years the form is said to have been precatory,—how are we to account for the innumerable passages in the fathers, about the necessity of con-

fession in order to the grace of absolution ; for the old penitentials ; and for the rites with which administration of the sacrament of absolution was performed ?

Before any person takes upon himself to decide that a form is not sufficient (sufficient, that is, to convey the characteristic grace of the sacrament of which it is the form) he ought distinctly to prove what essentially constitutes the form. Take now our present form in the order of visitation of the sick : it is not short, and every word in it is most admirably adapted for the occasion ; so that it would not appear to be easy to say how a word should be altered, much less omitted, with propriety. There is the declaration of the power of absolution, and of the qualifications necessary in the recipient ; a short prayer that our Lord would forgive the penitent ; an assertion by the minister that to him individually this power has been committed ; the exercise of that power ; closing with the awful formula, In the Name of the Blessed and Undivided Trinity.

But when, leaving “ propriety ” we pass on to the essential part of this form, I cannot see but that three words alone, *I absolve thee*, are sufficient ; following, as they do, after distinct confession of sins, and in order to assurance of pardon. I am not saying that these must be in every form of absolution, but that they alone would, and perhaps do, entirely and completely convey the grace of sacerdotal absolution. And in like manner as they convey it, so also do equivalent words. The reason is, because these or equi-

valent words fully express the action of the minister, the person of the recipient, and the grace of the ordinance.

The addition *In the Name*, etc. is essential to the form in baptism, because it was positively appointed by our Lord : not so, in the exercise of the power of sacerdotal absolution. Again ; the Church has, from the beginning, ruled the necessity of them in the one case, and has not so ruled in the other. Once more ; belief in the deep mystery of the Holy Trinity, is a primary object of that religion, of which baptism is, upon the part of the recipient, a solemn profession ;¹ not so, in any especial way, in the administration of absolution.

But, not to delay upon these enquiries, which are rather suited to the subtle disputation of the schools, than, in practice, tend to much general profit, let us examine a little further into the accounts which we have of the precatory form.

Morinus tells us² that he found in almost every ritual or penitential which he had seen, earlier than the year 1200, no other than a precatory or optative form of absolution in the administration of the sacrament of penance : in one or two of greater antiquity, and in more, about that period itself, he had observed the indicative form together with several prayers, or an optative form, preceding or following it. After the

¹ Dissertation on Holy Baptism.
p. 98.

² De admin. sacram. pœnitentiæ. lib. viij. cap. ij.

year 1200, he continues, it was decided that in general practice, this indicative *Absolvo te* should always be added to the prayers: for the more evident confirmation to the penitent, so to speak, of that grace of forgiveness which he was receiving. And the following were the scholastic reasons for this rule.

“ Primum, gratiam primam omnis meriti principium quæ non cedit sub meritum, quamque Deus producit in nobis sine nobis, esse gratiam habitualem nos justificantem, et gratos Deo reddentem. Secundum, quod ex priore non male concludebatur, confessionem ut esset valida et meritoria in charitate sive post justificationem et veram contritionem animo conceptam fieri debere, aut saltem finiri. Tertium axioma utriusque præcedentis consentaneum est, absolutionem esse tantum declarationem reo de remissione criminis sui factam.” It was from these principles that the schoolmen concluded that the form of absolution ought to be in the indicative rather than in a precatory form: and arguing first from the propriety of the change, some of them insisted also upon its necessity: which last position, if true, would carry with it as a consequence the fact that the Church, from the beginning, had always used an indicative form.

The reader will now observe, that in this question there are two important particulars. One, upon which the most learned men are divided; namely, the facts of the case: that is, how far Morinus is correct in his assertion, that for the first twelve centuries absolution was given by an optative or precatory form only: and

the second, whether absolution given by a precatory form would be equally valid as by an indicative. Upon this second particular, I really do not see why it may not be plainly asserted that theologians are unanimous in the affirmative: I do not remember to have met with any work yet in which the contrary position,—that absolution cannot be conveyed by a precatory form,—has even been fairly discussed, much less so far confirmed as to create a reasonable doubt.

Upon the whole matter, I may at once give my own opinion: which is, that it is doubtful whether Morinus, strong as many of his proofs are, has completely established his point; and that there is no doubt or question at all, whatever form may have been in use at any time, that the Catholic Church has always, from the age of the apostles to the present hour, both claimed and exercised the power of sacerdotal absolution which was given to her by our Blessed Lord: a power by which, through the ministry of her priests, she has conveyed remission of all sins to those who, having confessed, are sincerely penitent.

The arguments of Morinus are, after all, of a negative kind: not that they are therefore, without weight; for I have said that they are very weighty; but still they are so far negative, that they rest upon the absence in the earlier rituals, which have come down to us, of the indicative form. We know very well how cautious the primitive Church was in dispersing, even among her own people, the books of her divine worship. As time went on, and first one office and then another

was published, yet these were of the less sacred character: and it was many ages before the liturgy was fully in all its parts given openly to the world. This principle may have been, and very probably was, extended somewhat strictly to more parts than one of the ritual which concerned the administration of absolution, and to the penitentials. It by no means follows that because rituals still extant of the 9th, 10th and 11th centuries do not contain the actual indicative form itself, that therefore it was not in use: common and constant practice would have been an amply sufficient rule. No one who has studied the ancient manuscript service-books of the Church, and remembers how many the omissions frequently are, and the evident taking for granted of many things which now we are more ignorant about, will dispute the truth of this.

But, let those who, appealing to the old manuscripts or rather to the statements of the very learned Morinus, argue from them the novelty of the doctrine of sacerdotal absolution, explain to us how it is that we find all that doctrine, fully, plainly, and unequivocally, in these same manuscripts, with the sole exception of an indicative form? If a precatory form will not, cannot, convey equally the essential grace of absolution, then there may be something in the objection: into what that something will develope, I confess that I am at a loss to perceive; for a much greater difficulty it would be to account, reasonably, for all the exhortations and doctrines of the fathers, and the long apparatus of penitentials and rituals for 1000 years.

But, however this may be, the *first* step not the *second* is to prove the invalidity of a precatory form : when that point is settled,—and settled against the judgement of all who have hitherto investigated it, and not till then,—we may begin to enquire, with some doubt about the truth of the Catholic doctrine of sacerdotal absolution, whether the indicative form was or was not introduced about the year 1200 ?

A chief argument which Morinus urges, is from the scripture : but then that scripture is the text in S. James, *ch. 5. v. 16.* Of course, if persons allow that S. James in that place is indeed publishing and enforcing the ordinance of absolution, long before instituted by our Blessed Lord, they may justly and consistently draw what inferences they can prove, from the text itself. But unless they begin with the acknowledgment of this as a fact, they cannot argue from the admonition of the inspired apostle, either one way or the other. The conclusion to which Morinus comes will shew what I mean ; and how requisite it is to understand in more lights than one the bearing of passages in holy scripture to which we are ready to appeal, when we think that on some particular subject they may happen to support us. “ Confitemini invicem, sive alterutrum, hoc est, iis quibus peccata remittendi facultas concessa est.³ Sacerdotes igitur orationibus suis peccata remittunt sibi confitentibus. Hoc insuper demonstratur eodem prorsus argumento

³ See above : *p. 144* : the argument of Dr. Hammond.

quo idem de extrema unctione demonstrari potest : eadem enim videtur consequentia. Quapropter si ex hoc loco demonstratur deprecatoriam formulam in extrema unctione valere, eadem ratione idem de confessione demonstrabitur.”⁴

There are, it is quite certain, many places in the fathers in which they attribute the effect of sacerdotal absolution to intercession rather than to an indicative expression of authority. Such, for example, as these two or three which follow : and, whatever their value in proof of the use, very anciently, of a precatory form, they will not help persons much who deny the grace of the sacrament of absolution altogether. Thus, S. Ambrose, answering the heretical objection from the 1st book of Samuel, *ch. 2. v. 25*, says : “ *Non scriptum est, nullus orabit pro eo ; sed, quis orabit, hoc est, quis ille sit, qui in tali causa orare possit, quæritur, non excluditur.*”⁵ Compare also this place in his treatise of the Holy Spirit, where he speaks of a form though, it may be, precatory. “ *Nunc videamus utrum peccata donet Spiritus. Sed hic dubitari non potest, cum ipse Dominus dixerit, Accipite Spiritum Sanctum ; quorum remiseritis peccata, remissa erunt.* Ecce quia per Spiritum Sanctum peccata donantur. Homines autem in remissione peccatorum ministerium suum exhibent, non jus alicujus potestatis exercent. Neque enim in suo, sed in Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti nomine peccata dimittunt. Isti rogant, divinitas

⁴ De pœnit. *loc. cit. § iv.*

⁵ De pœnit. *lib. 1. cap. ix.*

donat; humanum enim obsequium, sed munificentia supernæ est potestatis.”⁶

S. Augustine also, arguing against the Donatists, applies the same reasoning to imposition of hands in giving absolution which he applies to the sacrament of holy baptism. The Donatists denied the grace of the sacraments when administered by wicked men. “Si ergo ad hoc valet quod dictum est in evangelio, Deus peccatorem non audit, ut per peccatorem sacramenta non celebrentur; quomodo exaudit homicidam deprecantem, vel super aquam baptismi, vel super oleum, vel super eucharistiam, vel super capita eorum quibus manus imponitur? Quæ omnia tamen fiunt et valeat, etiam per homicidas.”⁷

Again, S. Leo in an epistle to some bishops of Campania: “Sufficit illa confessio, quæ primum Deo offertur, tunc etiam sacerdoti qui pro delictis pœnitentium precator accedit.” And in another place; “Multum utile ac necessarium est, ut peccatorum reatus ante ultimum diem sacerdotali supplicatione solvatur.”⁸

⁶ *Lib. 3. cap. xvij.*

⁷ *De bapt. lib. 5. cap. xx.*

⁸ *Epist. lxxx-xci.*

Morinus quotes S. Leo, and it may serve towards a more due estimate of his authorities to remember, that Aquinas also refers to S. Leo, by way of an objection to his own argument: and answers

the objection. “¶ 2. Præterea. Leo Papa dicit, quod indulgentia Dei, nisi supplicationibus sacerdotum, nequit obtineri: loquitur autem de indulgentia Dei, quæ præstatur pœnitentibus; ergo forma hujus sacramenti debet esse per modum deprecationis Ad secundum dicendum, quod verbum Leonis est intelligendum

But, to pass over other testimonies of this kind which Morinus has produced, I shall trouble the reader further only with a passage, very famous in this controversy, from the works of William, bishop of Paris, about 1230. Speaking of a certain case, he says that in absolving the priest does not use an indicative form, but, (he continues) “ *magis orationem facit super eum, ut Deus absolutionem et remissionem, atque gratiam sanctificationis tribuat. Et nemo dubitat quin possit, et debeat confessor orare Patrem misericordiarum, et etiam remittat peccanti peccata, quæ nec ipse pœnitens in se cognoscit, et eidem confessori recognoscit.*

Unde in absolutione confitentium non consueverunt dicere sacerdotes, Dimittat tibi Deus peccata, quæ confessus es mihi, sed potius omnia.”⁹

The practice of the Greek Church, the effect and object of which no one I believe disputes, has always been to use a precatory form.¹⁰ And upon that effect

quantum ad depreciationem, quæ præmittitur absolutioni, non autem removet, quin sacerdotes absolutant.” Summa. *pars. III. qu. lxxxiv. art. 3.*

⁹ De sacram. pœnitentiæ. *cap. xix.*

¹⁰ The learned reader will remember that some great authorities argue that the Greek Form is not *optative* in that sense which some would put upon it. Thus, Arcadius, having discussed the

whole matter at length in detail, continues: “ His relictis opinionibus postremo loco omnium probabilissimam, dixerim etiam certissimam, quippe quæ minimam, vel potius nullam meo judicio patiatur difficultatem hic inserendam, et stabiendum esse duxi sententiam. Ea vero ejusmodi est quæ asserat hujus sacramenti formam apud Græcos non esse imperativam, non deprecatoriam, neque mixtam, sed omnino enunciativam, et ut ita dicam αἰθερτικὴν καὶ δικαιοτικὴν

and grace of absolution so conveyed, we may hear one of their own patriarchs, of Constantinople, who is

auctoritativam, ac judicialem (quanquam et imperativa talis esse possit) talem enim præ se fert sensus et significatio horum verborum, ἔχω σε συγκεχωρήμενον, ad verbum, habeo te venia donatum, hoc est, συγχωρῶ σοι τὰ ἀμαρτήματα, veniam do, ignosco, condono, indulgeo, seu remitto tibi peccata." *Concordia. lib. iv. cap. 3. p. 369.* And he proceeds to establish this explanation by many similar examples.

But at the commencement of the chapter, Arcudius says. "Ante omnia duo sunt consideranda. Alterum, nullam unquam fuisse controversiam de hac re inter Græcos, et Latinos, ac proinde non esse verisimile, antiquam formam hujus sacramenti ex odio alicujus, vel malitia mutatam aliquando fuisse Alterum, incredibile dictu videri, Græcorum ecclesiam nunquam habuisse veram formam hujus sacramenti." *Ibid. p. 351.* and, in another place, he further observes : "Convenit inter Græcos et Latinos causam supremam, et primam remissionis peccatorum, esse Deum optimum maximum. Ministrum vero constat esse causam instrumentalem, quæ ut consequatur suum effectum, a principali agente moveatur necesse est Præterea quod forma per modum

orationis æquipolleat indicativis ex eo probatur. Æque enim benedit sacerdos cum dicit, benedico te, et cum dicit, te Deus benedicat, loquens ad hominem. etc." *Ibid. p. 357.*

Goar also ; "Certe forma hujus sacramenti etsi deprecativa, non excludit, imo continet actionem ministri, sicque ad indicativam potest reduci; quemadmodum et indicativa Dei misericordiam pœnitenti necessariam expostulat simplicite . . . Forma autem est hujusmodi, ἔχω σε συγκεχωρημένον, *Habeo te condonatum*: pœnitens si quidem omnis cum peccatis enumeratis, et cordis contritione manifesta, veniam a Deo, et a spirituali patre rogare soleat, his vulgaribus suæ linguae verbis : παρακαλῶ νὰ μοῦ συγχωρήσῃς, *precor ut veniam mihi eroges*, si petitioni annuat, et peccatorem indulgentia dignum putet, ad mentem rogantis laudatum illud, ἔχω σε συγκεχωρημένον, respondet πνευματικός. Quæ verba Latinorum æquipollere formæ, et eadem virtute pollere, fuse demonstrat Arcudius: præter cujus expositionem, hoc solum superest addendum: illud, *habeo te veniam donatum*, aut *condonatum*, esse idem penitus ac, *facio, reddo te veniam donatum*, aut *condonatum*, quod absolute est *venia donare*,

quoted by Morinus. The argument as stated by this writer is as follows:

“ Hieremias . . . precibus sacerdotis remissionem peccatorum tribuit. Docet Hieremias peccata remitti a sacerdote si pœnitens ea confiteatur, corde contrito et humiliato. . . . Confitenda autem esse omnia peccata paulo ante dixerat, ‘ Oportet, confitentem quoad possit et recordetur, peccata particulatim exponere :’ et statim post illa verba quibus orationis virtutem commendavit, addit ex S. Basilio, ‘ Omne peccatum exponendum est apud antistitem, malitia enim silentio tecta morbus est subexulceratus animæ. Et cap. 13. sacramentorum virtutem precibus tribuit, ‘ Precationes enim ad Deum convertunt, peccatorumque veniam impen-trant.’ His etiam simul cum oraculis divinis virtutem tribuit conversionis panis in Corpus Christi.”¹⁷

Here let me remark, in a brief word ; that the effect of prayer, either implied as by the whole Church or expressed at the time of administration by the minister, is one of the most deep and subtle questions in theology. With regard to baptism, I have largely explained the judgement of the Church in another work ; so also as to the eucharist (of which Hieremias speaks) elsewhere ; and who shall venture to put limits to its necessity and to its efficacy in the sacrament of abso-

aut condonare : mutua est enim activorum et passivorum consequentia et correlatio, nec nisi venia donans, alium venia donatum con-

stituere potest : condonare autem peccatum, est illud absolvere.”
Euchologion. p. 676.

¹⁷ De pœnit. loc. cit. cap. xij.

lution? And, properly understood, no difficulties arise from the acknowledgment of this truth, which interfere at all with the catholic doctrine of the certainty of sacramental grace. We may well say with Albertus Magnus, "Ecclesiæ orationes certas esse, licet particulares, vel singulares incertæ essent. Unde omne sacramentum contrahit certitudinem sui effectus per hoc quod non innititur orationi unius personæ, sed ecclesiæ. Impossibile est enim orationes ecclesiæ non exaudiri; et ideo propter certitudinem non oportebat formam suam esse in oratione enuntiativa."¹² And with another writer whom Morinus quotes; "Neque vero ex eo quod sit deprecatoria sequitur effectum ejus esse incertum, quia Deus non exaudit peccatores, et peccator sacramentum ministrans potest esse improbus, et male dispositus; neque enim oratio tunc fit solo nomine sacerdotis, sed præsertim nomine Christi, et ecclesiæ cui sacerdos vicarius est, sicque oratio non privatur idcirco suo effectu saltem primario, sed eum obtinet ex opere operato propter Christi institutionem, ac promissionem ecclesiæ factam." And, once more, with Laiman: "In eo convenient formæ omnes sacramentorum quod eorum efficacitas non pendeat ex vi orationis, ut est opus operantis, sed ex virtute promissionis Christi secundum quam ad Deum Patrem oratio funditur."¹³

If the meaning and intent of absolution had been supposed by the Church for the first twelve hundred

¹² In iv. dist. 23. art. 4.

¹³ Cit. Morinus. cap. xx.

years to be but a loosing from ecclesiastical censures, and restoration to outward communion, it would be a hard thing to account for the use of an optative or precatory form. The power of enforcing external discipline, or, at least, the claim to it, is so natural, nay, so inherent in the very constitution itself of all communities, that there would have been little need for an avowal of humility in its actual exercise. And the very fact, if it is true, that the precatory form was in use for so many centuries, is to my mind a strongly convincing evidence of the truth of the doctrine now held by the church of England. That is; that the effect of sacerdotal absolution is the removal of the guilt and penalty of mortal sin. But I shall again avail myself of the language of Morinus. “Effectus in penitente per absolutionem productus, remissio est peccatorum, et Sancti Spiritus donatio. Dona sane tanta, tam magnifica, ut digna omnino sint propter quæ vadimonium ut ita dicam deseratur, consuetaque judicibus loquendi formula. Infinitis enim parasangis superant hi effectus omnium creaturarum potestatem. Quapropter cum tantæ sit efficaciæ sententia sacerdotis absolutoria super pœnitentem pronunciata, quid mirum si verecundatus sacerdos modo deprecatorio eam effert, ut sic Deum auctorem, se vero tam excelsi doni ministrum solum profiteatur. S. Chrysostomus notat Dominum nostrum paralytico a se sanato dixisse, *Sanus factus es*, etc. non, sanum te feci, ut humilitatem et modestiam suam demonstraret, eaque nos ad eam erudiret. . . . Quanto magis sacerdos misellus pec-

cator oratione sua se nudum esse tanti effectus ministrum declarabit. Aliquando oratione, (inquit Chrysostomus) aliquando auctoritate miracula patrabat, et peccata remittebat; oratione, ut humilitate sua se a Patre missum; auctoritate, ut se Patri aequalem demonstraret. . . . Est igitur idem utriusque locutionis effectus; sed indicativus primæ personæ principalem causam sonat, et auctoritatem innuit sibi per semetipsum competentem, αὐθεντίαν καὶ αὐτεξουσίαν. Fortius enim prima causa loqui non possit. Deprecativa vero ministerialem necessario dicit, et a prima usurpari non potest. Ideo Christus ut θεάνθρωπος utraque usus est: posteriore ut humili et ministeriali, cum Divinitatis radios emicantes comprimere voluit.”¹⁴

I shall conclude this part of my observations upon the precatory form, with the forcible enquiry of a very celebrated author; “Si expressio solius ministri sufficit, ut exercentis actum, Ego te baptizo, cur non sufficiat expressio Christi qui per suum ministrum baptizat?”¹⁵

But, as has been already said, this fact of a precatory form alone for so many hundred years, is a disputed point. At the very time when, according to Morinus, the indicative form was introduced, Aquinas wrote a treatise in which he uses expressions scarcely in possible accordance with such a fact, if it be true. In quoting these, I adduce them merely and simply as

¹⁴ Ibid. cap. xx.

¹⁵ Sotus, in 4, dist. iij, qu. unica. art. 5. cit. ibid. cap. xxij.

they bear upon the question of fact, and not of doctrine.

Aquinas is contending against a writer who had argued that the form *Ego te absolvo* ought not to be used : and he continues ; “ quod quidem præsumptuosum judico, quia repugnat evangelicis dictis. Dicit enim Dominus, *quodcunque solveris, etc.* Patet ergo ex dictis Salvatoris, quod habens claves absolvit. Præsumptuosum est ergo, ne dicam erroneum, ut sacerdos dicere non possit, *Ego absolvo te*, quem Dominus absolvere confitetur.” This would all be compatible with a mere allowance of either form : but presently, we find : “ Potest, ergo, habens claves ex tradita sibi potestate dicere, *Ego te absolvo*. Non solum autem hoc convenienter dicere potest, sed et necessarium esse videtur : sacramenta enim novæ legis efficiunt quod figurant ; figurant autem seu significant et ex materia, et ex forma verborum.” And, afterwards : “ In sacramento pœnitentiae verba scripturæ, quæ maxime sunt sectanda, non faciunt mentionem de aliqua deprecatione ; sed magis verbo indicativo utitur. Non enim dicit : quæcumque petieris esse solvenda, erunt soluta ; sed, *quæcumque solveris, erunt soluta*, etc.”¹⁶

We must allow, I suppose, if a precatory form alone had been in use until the end of the 12th century, that such language as the above would be strange and unaccountable in the mouth of so great a writer as

¹⁶ Opusc. 22.

Aquinas; who, himself flourishing about the year 1250, must have known almost by experience the practice of the preceding century, even if he had not been so learned as he was, or so constantly in the society of learned men. Nor is it quite easy to discover, why any one should be called presumptuous and an opposer of the plain words of scripture, who should endeavour in the beginning of the 12th century to support the continued reception of a form, which had been in constant use from the age of the apostles down to the year 1200.

I shall also quote Aquinas, more generally, from his argument in the Summa. “¶ 3. Præterea. Idem est absolvere a peccato, quod peccatum remittere: sed solus Deus peccatum remittit, qui etiam solus interius hominem a peccato mundat; ergo videtur, quod solus Deus a peccato absolvat: non ergo debet sacerdos dicere, *Ego te absolvo*, sicut non dicit, *Ego tibi peccata remitto . . .* ¶ Ad tertium dicendum, quod solus Deus per auctoritatem et a peccato absolvit, et peccatum remittit: sacerdotes tamen utrumque faciunt per ministerium, in quantum, sc. verba sacerdotis in hoc sacramento instrumentaliter operantur in virtute divina, sicut etiam in aliis sacramentis. Nam virtus divina est, quæ interius operatur in omnibus sacramentalibus signis, sive sint res, sive verba: unde et Dominus expressit utrumque: nam Matt. xvij. dixit Petro; *Quocunque solveris super terram*, etc. et Joan. xx, dixit discipulis; *Quorum remiseritis peccata, remittuntur eis*: ideo tamen sacerdos potius dicit: *Ego te*

absolvo, quam ; Ego tibi peccata remitto : quia hoc magis congruit verbis, quæ Dominus dixit, virtutem clavum ostendens, per quas sacerdotes absolvunt : quia tamen sacerdos, sicut minister, absolvit, convenienter apponitur aliquid, quod pertineat ad primam auctoritatem Dei, sc. ut dicatur : Ego te absolvo in nomine Patris, etc. vel per virtutem passionis Christi, vel auctoritate Dei. Quia tamen hoc non est determinatum ex verbis Christi, sicut in baptismo, talis ap-positio relinquitur arbitrio sacerdotis.”¹⁷

To return : the change, moreover, from a precatory to an indicative form is not a slight matter : slight, that is, as people commonly would have naturally regarded it at the time. And where, except negatively, is the evidence of this change ? from one universal observance to another, which could not fail to have been observed and commented on very largely

¹⁷ *Pars. III. qu. lxxxiv. art. 3.*
And he further argues against the objection that *Ego te absolvo* means *Absolutum ostendo*, which no one who has not received a revelation can say without presumption : “ ¶ Ad quintum dicendum, quod ista expositio, *Ego te absolvo*, id est, absolutum ostendo, quantum ad aliquid quidem vera est, non tamen est perfecta : sacramenta enim novæ legis non solum significant, sed etiam faciunt, quod significant. Unde, sicut sacerdos, baptizando aliquem, ostendit hominem interius ablu-

tum per verba, et facta, et non solum significative, sed etiam effective, ita etiam, cum dicit ; *Ego te absolvo*, ostendit hominem absolutum non solum significative, sed etiam effective, nec tamen loquitur quasi de re incerta. Quia, sicut alia sacramenta novæ legis habent de se certum effectum ex virtute passionis Christi, licet possit impediri ex parte recipientis, ita etiam et in hoc sacramento. Unde nec sacerdos indiget speciali revelatione sibi facta, sed sufficit generalis revelatio fidei, per quam remittuntur peccata.” *Ibid.*

at the time. Where, again, is any decree, or canon of general council, to the same purpose? How, also, is it that some one or more particular churches did not retain the old form? How came it that all, as by mutual consent, should at once adopt a new form? Was there any flagrant error at that period which demanded such a substitution?

Nor, in the centuries immediately succeeding the 12th, does Aquinas stand alone in his assertion as to the *necessity* of an indicative form. I repeat, that we are not now, in any way, discussing doctrine, but fact: and, whatever may be said against the correctness of such a conclusion about necessity,—and I think it certainly incorrect, in any other sense than referred to the authority and order of the Church,—yet as to the historical fact, it is a difficult thing to account for such opinions, if the precatory form had only very lately been discontinued throughout the whole Western Church. It can only be accounted for by presuming the existence of a system of argument, of which no one other example can be produced.

Thus, in the 14th century, John Gerson begins his note upon the form of absolution: “*Forma absolutonis a peccatis et necessaria, est, Ego absolvo te.*”¹⁸

¹⁸ *Opera, tom. 2. p. 482.* At the end he says:

“*Nota. Illa particula: In nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti, Amen;* additur ad denotandum quod a Deo est quod ab-

solvit; vel quia omnia sacramenta flunt in virtute fidei Trinitatis, et passionis Jesu Christi Domini nostri: *Nec est,* (ut Thomas dicit in tertia parte Summæ) *de substantia absolutionis; sed relin-*

In the next century, Gabriel Biel. “*Forma absolutionis hæc est: Absolvo te ab omnibus peccatis tuis, et sumitur ex verbis Christi, Quodcumque solveris super terram, erit solutum et in cælis.* Absolutiones autem in publico factæ, sc. *Misereatur tui*, etc. vel *Indulgentiam et remissionem*, etc. non sunt sacramentales, sed orationes ordinatæ ad remissionem peccatorum venialium. En ergo in sacramentali absolutione non sufficeret eas dicere: quia presbyter non per eas significat fieri absolutionem, sed petit ut fiat.”¹⁹

We will not further discuss this matter; in truth, as I have said already, the question whether there was in the western Church for 1200 years a precatory form of absolution, and no other,—a question very doubtful indeed as it seems to me,—whichever way decided, does not affect the catholic doctrine of the grace of sacerdotal absolution. It is a question of ecclesiastical discipline and rule: similar exactly to the ancient rite of trine immersion in the sacrament of holy baptism. Able as the arguments are which have been brought forward by Morinus, they yet, even if the difficulty from testimonies of the 13th and

quitur arbitrio sacerdotis, qui cum sit ut instrumentaliter currens, etc. sive ut minister absolvat, convenienter apponit illud quod pertinet ad primam auctoritatem Dei, sc. ut dicatur; Ego te absolvo in nomine Patris, etc. quia tamen hoc non est determini-

natum ex verbis Christi: Quodcumque ligaveris super terram, etc. sicut in baptismo; talis appositiō ibi, et non in baptismo, relinquit arbitrio sacerdotis.” p. 483.

¹⁹ In 4. dist. xiv. qu. 2.

14th centuries were passed over, fail in the complete establishment of his assertion. And when we come to examine carefully his strongest point, namely, the absence of the indicative form in the earliest manuscripts, we find that the rituals which he cites are not all, in those places, giving the rite of administration of private or sacerdotal absolution. We cease, therefore, to wonder that prayers only are in those offices which were drawn up for the public reconciliation of notorious offenders *in cæna Domini*, or for the quick and hurried absolution of a penitent at the point of death. The whole subject is well worthy the diligent care of the student, opening up, as it does, many deep questions in theology: he will be repaid for whatever labour he may be able to bestow on it.

But it will be according to my plan, to lay before the reader an extract from a note upon the form in the due administration of the sacrament of absolution, which John de Athon makes upon one of the constitutions of Othobon: it is important as shewing that according to the judgement at that time of the great canonist, the indicative form in the exact words of the constitution was not essential. The canon ordered; “*Omnis autem, qui confessiones aliquorum audiunt, a peccatis expresse confitentes absolvant, verba subscripta specialiter exprimentes, Ego te a peccatis tuis auctoritate qua fungor, absolvo.*” The gloss is: “*Expresse. Hoc habet respicere dictionem sequentem confitentes: et tunc per hoc intellige excludie omnem velationem et palliationem, quæ tendere posset ad ex-*

cusandas excusationes in peccatis: vel potest determinare dictionem *absolvant* hic sequentem, et sic hoc plenius declaratur in textu, qui hic sequitur. *Absolvo* debet ergo absolutio impertiri per hæc expressa verba, ut hic patet, supple, vel æquipollentia. Nam cum hic se referat ad effectum potius quod ad exactam formam faciendi, non refert qualiter fiat, dummodo fit.”²⁰

I have but one more brief observation to offer, before I pass from this question of the Form in absolution. It has always appeared to me to be an extraordinary question for any priest of the church of England to enquire, “What form ought I to use in the administration of private absolution?” I say, extraordinary: because if he can have managed to convince himself that our Church no longer claims and exercises, or no longer orders her ministers to exercise, the power of remitting and of retaining sins, he would not dare to make a pretence of doing this very act, for any conceivable purpose which I can imagine. Or, again, if he does believe that the doctrine of the church of England upon absolution is in accordance with all antiquity and with her own formularies, it is a question which he ought to have settled for himself before he ventured, kneeling before the bishop, to “receive the Holy Ghost for the office and work of a priest in the Church of God.” Part of that work is, to give to those who need it “the benefit of abso-

²⁰ *Tit. 2. cap. Quoniam cæca.*

lution." The visitation office of the sick supplies a proper form: being there provided, *the most proper* for every occasion: still, if he would wish to use some other, he is not bound to that form only. All essential conditions being completed; his own judgement satisfied; both priest and penitent knowing and intending what is about to be performed; it would be, as I have already said, *sufficient*, if he simply said, "I absolve thee." Few men indeed, I suppose, would say these words only, so bare; few but who would also, with the fuller and authorized form, say some psalms, and prayers before the absolution, and some prayers afterwards: among these last, especially, that most ancient and solemn prayer (itself, alone, possibly a sufficient form); "O most merciful God, Who, according to the multitude of Thy mercies, *etc.*" But in short, he would remember the rule of the canonist: "non refert qualiter fiat, dummodo fit."

II. In a note above, p. 190. I have alluded to the fact that among the disputationes of the schools, it was not unfrequently debated, how far each part of the ordinance of penance availed towards the completion of the whole. Contrition; and resolutions of amendment; and faith; and distinct confession; and a formal absolution;—all these being held to be necessary to remission of sins in and by this ordinance, theologians went on to dispute the relative value, so to put it, of each. Thus, some argued that God Himself pardoned the sinner and admitted him again into a state of grace upon contrition only: others, on the contrary,

that pardon was not given until the absolution also had been pronounced by the priest. Hence the first would hold that the form is declarative rather than effective ; the last that it is strictly effective.

But the question in this manner debated was entirely upon details in no kind of way, so far as the arguments of the schoolmen are concerned, affecting the real matter which authors in later ages have denied, viz : the grace itself of sacerdotal absolution. Nor is there the slightest reason for the objection which has been often urged against absolution altogether, as derived from their works: namely, that according to the acknowledgement of the schoolmen, contrition is alone sufficient to restore man to the favour of God. This may or may not be true, as a doctrine; into that point I am not enquiring now; what I assert is, that such a statement is not really to be found in any of the writings which have been hitherto appealed to for this purpose. Whenever any of those authors speak of contrition as effective (so to speak) of remission of sins, they are always discoursing of the ordinance or sacrament of penance as a whole : in other words they hold, without exception, this doctrine ; that contrition, however perfect it may be, does not remit deadly sins, *nisi in ordine ad claves ecclesiae*. I think the reader will at once perceive how utterly this alters the state of the case.

It has been said, “ In fact, the doctrine that actual remission of sin is conveyed by priestly absolution, is contrary to the universal opinion of the ancients ; for

they all admitted, even the Master of Sentences, that wherever there was true contrition, there was actual remission *previous* to any sacerdotal absolution.”²¹ I have just explained in what sense the schoolmen, when they so argued, are to be understood; but, besides this, it is not correct to say that they “all admitted it.” It was a question debated, not settled: and, let me further observe, it was a question (treated as it then was) in reality falling far short of much practical good, though it sprang from a most excellent and Christian principle; namely, from the desire to insist upon and to press the absolute necessity of contrition in order to the reception of the blessings of sacerdotal absolution. I say, it failed as to its practical results; because those writers never considered contrition as sufficient apart and distinct from absolution. If they had done so, and deliberated upon it in the spirit and according to the judgement of earlier fathers of the Church, I cannot doubt but that we might have derived, upon this article of the Faith also, a purer doctrine from their labours.

The place usually referred to in this discussion is from the sentences of Peter Lombard, and the reader will wish to see it. It is in part of the 18th distinction of the 4th book. Having referred to the old illustration of the loosing of Lazarus, first raised from the dead by our Blessed Lord, and to the Levitical rule

²¹ A Letter, etc. By the Rev. F. T. Hill. p. 11.

regarding lepers, he continues : “ Evangelici sacerdotes peccata dimitunt, vel retinent, dum dimissa a Deo vel retenta judicant, et ostendunt.” Nor does the Master stand alone ; he has other great names in support of the same opinion ; if I am not mistaken, Bonaventure, Gabriel Biel, and Alensis.

Since therefore Peter Lombard has been quoted to prove that contrition alone is sufficient to obtain pardon from God, it is but just to him that we should enquire what he meant by contrition : for if he did not mean that absolution after oral confession is *therefore* unnecessary, I do not quite see of what use his authority is in this discussion. The *Distinction* which precedes the one just extracted from, is concerned with the question of the necessity of confession. Having stated the various opinions which men, from time to time, had offered, he proceeds thus : “ Quid ergo super his sentiendum sit, quid tenendum ? sane dici potest, quod sine confessione oris, et solutione pœnæ exterioris peccata delentur per contritionem et humilitatem cordis. Ex quo enim proponit mente compuncta se confessurum, Deus dimitit : quia ibi est confessio cordis, etsi non oris, per quam anima interiorius mundatur a macula, et contagione peccati commissi, et debitum æternæ mortis relaxatur . . . Sicut enim præcepta est nobis interior poenitentia, et ita oris confessio, et exterior satisfactio, si adsit facultas. Unde nec vere pœnitens est, qui confessionis votum non habet . . . Oportet ergo pœnitentum confiteri peccata, si tempus habeat : et tamen antequam sit confessio in

ore, si votum sit in corde,²² præstatur ei remissio.” The author then enquires whether confession made to God alone, can suffice? and thus concludes: “Indubitanter ostenditur, oportere Deo primum, et deinde sacerdoti offerri confessionem: nec aliter posse perveniri ad ingressum Paradisi, si adsit facultas.” As I cannot admit the truth of this conclusion, so neither

²² “Objicis primo, de fide esse contritionem justificare peccatorum: ergo illa sufficit. Respondeatur contritionem nec haberri, neque esse veram contritionem sine voto sacramenti respective ad peccata non confessa; hoc autem votum cessat, quando adest opportunitas confitendi de præsenti; quam si quis negligat sine impedimento, contemnit Contritio est medium extraordinarium et subordinatum poenitentiaæ, cui non æquivalet; quantum ad obligationem præcepti, quando ipsa poenitentia adhiberi potest Dices, ipsa contritio perfecta semper justificat ante confessionem, et absolutionem etiam in sacramento: ergo ex necessitate justificationis, ex qua colligitur præceptum poenitendi, non sequitur obligatio confessionis. Respondeatur clarum esse obligationem manere, non obstante contritione, sive tum, sive alias fiat confessio: quia Deus non remittit peccatum nisi in ordine ad confessionem faciendam, et sine ejus voto: in-

tentio autem confitendi de præsenti continet in se votum confessionis. Itaque contritioni etiam ut in sacramento sit, non correspondet justificatio, nisi ut subest tali intentioni, sicut nec extra sacramentum, nisi ut subest voto: satisfactio enim completa, quam Deus exigit pro peccato, per contritionem et confessionem fit, ideoque requirit ut confessio exhibeat in reipsa, vel certe in affectu, et proposito absoluto confitendi, sive de præsenti, si adest copia confessoris, et urgeat præceptum, sive de futuro; alterutro deficiente, deficit vera poenitentia.” Duns Scotus. Opera. tom. 9. *Hiquæi comment.* p. 320. *Sentent. lib. iv. dist. 17.* Protesting against the truth of the doctrine advocated in this extract, I yet assert that it is a true and correct view of the teaching of Lombard, or Bonaventure, upon the value of contrition, as being effective of remission of deadly sin.

should I think it right to appeal to Peter Lombard as an authority to prove that remission of sins is not conveyed by priestly absolution, *because* that writer argues that by contrition previous to confession, *si votum sit in corde*, pardon is obtained.

The reader has probably not forgotten the extracts which have been given above, referring to the resurrection of Lazarus, in illustration of the catholic doctrine of the grace of sacerdotal absolution. Even as that saint was not loosed from the bonds wherewith he was bound until after he had been raised from the dead, and had come forth, at the voice of the Redeemer; so when priestly absolution is sought for by the penitent, it has no effect unless beforehand the sinner has been raised by the Lord from the death of sin, and his resurrection to a life again of grace begun, though not perfected and complete. In such an one, the spiritual life begun is the effect of actual grace inwardly exciting and rousing the soul. Completed resurrection and perfect spiritual life,—life renewed and set at liberty,—is the effect of justifying grace. The first may be believed to precede always sacramental absolution, in like manner as the raising of Lazarus by our Lord preceded the loosing of his bonds by the disciples; the second is given by the power and efficacy of absolution itself. Hence we see the true force and meaning of the passage, cited above, from S. Gregory : “ut quos omnipotens Deus per compunctionis gratiam visitat, illos pastoris sententia absolvat.”

But I shall finish these remarks with two passages

from Aquinas: to which no one can object, seeing that this difficulty about contrition is solely based upon the authority of the schools. “Constat enim, quod Dominus Lazarum suscitavit, et discipulis solvendum mandavit: ergo discipuli absolvunt. Per hoc ergo non ostenditur, quod sacerdos non absolvat, aut non debeat dicere, Ego te abservo, sed quod eum non debet absolvere in quo signa contritionis non videt, per quam homo justificatur interius a Deo culpa remissa.”²³ And again, on the Distinction itself in the sentences. “Poenitentia, in quantum est sacramentum, præcipue in confessione perficitur; quia per eam homo ministris ecclesiæ se subdit, qui sunt sacramentorum dispensatores. Contritio enim votum confessionis annexum habet. Et quia in sacramento poenitentiæ gratia infunditur, per quam fit remissio peccatorum, sicut in baptismo; ideo eodem modo ex vi absolutionis conjunctæ remittit culpam, sicut baptismus.”²⁴

²³ *Opusc.* xxij. *Opera.* tom. 17.
fol. 194. *v.*

Again: “Nullus reputatur contritus, nisi habeat propositum subjiciendi se ecclesiæ clavibus, quod est habere sacramentum in voto.”

Ibid.

²⁴ *Sentent.* IV. dist. xvij. *qu.*
3. *a.* 5.

“Sciendum est, quod si intelligat, quod sacerdos sua auctoritate super culpam potentiam non habet, dicit verum. Si autem intelligit quod sacramentum quod

sacerdos ut minister tradit, non se extendat ad remissionem culpæ, falsum dicit. Sicut enim per baptismum dimittitur omnis culpa et originalis, et actualis; ita per sacramentum poenitentiæ remittitur actualis culpa. Contingit autem quandoque in baptismo, quod aliquis antequam sacramentum baptismi actu percipit dum habet sacramentum in voto, vel in proposito, consequitur justificationem a solo Deo, et tamen si ante consecutus non fuerit ex vi sacra-

In short, the whole question is exactly parallel with one which may be raised upon the declaration in our Common-prayer book regarding the sacrament of baptism; namely; “Whereby ye may perceive the great necessity of this sacrament, where it may be had.” Or, again, regarding the eucharist; that “If a man by any just impediment, do not receive the sacrament of Christ’s Body and Blood, the curate shall instruct him, that if he do truly repent of his sins, and steadfastly believe that Jesus Christ has suffered death upon the Cross for him, and shed His Blood for his redemption, earnestly remembering the benefits he hath thereby, and giving Him hearty thanks therefore, he doth eat and drink the Body and Blood of our Saviour Christ profitably to his soul’s health, although he do not receive the sacrament with his mouth.”²⁵ Both these statements are in entire accordance with the constant doctrine of our Church from all antiquity: but who would presume to conclude from them that any derogation was intended of the actual, certain, and ordinary blessings of either sacrament? So it is, when men, speaking and arguing expressly of the ordinance of sacerdotal absolution, go

menti, nisi obicem opponat, justificationem consequitur sacramentum suscipiendo: ita omnino est de pœnitentia.” *Id. Opusc. xxij.*

²⁵ Anciently these were the consoling words which, in such a case, the priest was directed to

say to the sick man: “Frater, in hoc casu sufficit tibi vera fides, et bona voluntas: tantum crede, et manducasti.” *Monum. Rituaria. vol. I. p. 89.* And see the note there.

on to enquire into and distinguish its several parts, and determine how far contrition will alone convey remission and God's grace to the penitent, where absolution itself, being earnestly desired, cannot be had.

III. I would say one or two words upon venial sins : and this, without any attempt to discuss the subtle questions which many authors have raised in this matter.

When we talk of venial sin, as opposed to the mortal or deadly sin, of which the litany and the xvijth article speak, we cannot, I believe, justly include under that term any offence beyond some light and wandering thought, or hasty word, or immoderate action, which if we had had time seriously to reflect upon, we would with God's assistance have used our best endeavours to restrain. Wilfulness of intention, or deliberation about the act itself, alters its character. Even however rapid such offences may in the commission of them be, however acutely we may grieve about them the moment after, we must nevertheless sorrowfully own that they were an offence in the sight of the Most High, and have left stains and spots upon the soul. I know very well how difficult, nay how impossible it must be, to distinguish and to determine classes of sins : to myself, the mere attempt appears to be both dangerous and improper. Better is it to say with S. Augustine : "Quæ sint autem levia, et quæ gravia peccata, non humano sed divino sunt pensanda iudicio."²⁶ Or, again ; "Quæ sint ipsa peccata, quæ ita

²⁶ Enchiridion. cap. lxxvij.

impeditur perventionem ad regnum Dei, difficillimum est invenire, periculosissimum definire.”²⁷

But, on the other hand, it is no less repulsive to our judgement, and to our trust in the infinite goodness of God, to be called upon to include all actions which offend Him under one equal class of deadly, heinous, sin. And not only so, but to listen to positions such as this which was put forth and defended by Luther; “Opus bonum optime factum, est veniale peccatum.”²⁸ Melanethon wrote in language more accordant with the truth: when, after speaking of heathens, he continues; “Sed de renatis necesse est quæri, qui habeant peccata venialia, et qui eorum lapsus dicantur mortalia peccata. Quanquam igitur renati, in quibus accensa est agnitus Christi, . . . tamen in eis adhuc in

²⁷ *De civitate Dei. lib. 21. cap. xxvij.*

²⁸ *Assertio articulorum. xxxij.*
—*Opera. tom. 2. p. 116.*

Bishop Fisher thus addresses Luther: “Nunquam assequeris, Luthere, meo judicio veritatem, quamdiu promiscue res ad hunc modum hasce confundis. Nihil enim distinguis inter regenerationem unam aut alteram, nihil inter concupiscentiam et peccatum, nihil inter veniale peccatum, et mortale.” *Assert. Lutheran. confutatio. Art. ij. fol. xl. b.*

A number of erroneous propositions were complained of by the lower house of Convocation in

1536, as being “commonly preached, taught, and spoken” at that time in this realm; I have already, above, cited this complaint. Among them, that it was taught, for example; “that a man hath no free-will;” or, “that it is not necessary or profitable to have any church or chancel to pray in;” &c. and to our present purpose, these: “*Item*, that there is no distinction of sins after this sort, sin to be venial, and sin to be mortal. *Item*. That all sins, after that the sinner be once converted, are made by the merits of Christ’s passion venial sins, that is to say, sins clean forgiven.” *Wilkins. Concil. tom. 3. p. 805.*

hac vita manet ingens infirmitas, videlicet caligo in mente de Deo, et voluntatis ac cordis prava inclinatio, et multi vitiosi affectus. Incurrunt in animum pravæ dubitationes . . . sunt item ignorantiae et omissionis peccata plurima in sanctis. Hæc mala in renatis sunt contra legem Dei ; et quanta sit deformitas, quanta magnitudo horum malorum, pii in veris doloribus aliquo modo agnoscent . . . Dixi de veniali peccato. Sed cum hi qui fuerunt renati, scientes et volentes violant legem Dei . . . hæc actiones contra conscientiam, sunt peccata mortalia, quæ admittens, amittit gratiam, fidem, et Spiritum Sanctum.” Again ; under another title of the same common-places : “ Peccatum aliud est regnans, seu mortale. Aliud est non regnans, quod usitate nominatur veniale . . . Mortale est, cum is, qui fuerat renatus, assentitur errori in fundamento, aut labitur contra conscientiam. Tunc enim amittit gratiam, Spiritum Sanctum, et fidem . . . Peccatum non regnans quod nominatur veniale, id est, propter quod non amittuntur gratia, Spiritus Sanctus, et fides, est in renatis in hac vita malum originis, et dubitationes, et incendia malorum affectuum, quibus tamen repugnant renati, ne ruant contra conscientiam, et dolent propter has sordes, et credunt se propter Mediatorem Deo placere, tegi has sordes, et gratiam exuberare supra peccatum.”²⁹

If one would still ask of what kind or description deadly sin certainly is, let him read carefully besides

²⁹ Loc. comm. fol. 224. 310.

other parts of holy Scripture, the first chapter of the epistle to the Romans ; or the sixth of the first epistle to the Corinthians ; or the fifth chapter to the Galatians. Let him further remember that where there is the slightest determination and intent, with forethought, to commit one of those sins, or any sins like them, whether in the mind or with any member of the body, the commission of it cannot be called by a name so light, mean what it will, as venial. The knowledge of all this, and the practice of it, will effectually prevent any danger being the consequence of observing the distinction of mortal and venial sin. Venial sin is that which, daily and hourly, prevents the best and holiest men from being perfect : it is that which humbles them by the experience of their own weakness, and continually brings them in grief and sorrow before the throne of the Almighty, crying ; “ Forgive us our trespasses :” it is that, and that only, which none of us, with all our endeavours can, if I may say so, help committing from the infection of nature which “ doth remain, yea in them that are regenerated.” Still, nevertheless, sin.

S. Augustin in the *de civitate Dei* has some remarks upon the “ lust of the flesh,” which he introduces as a comment upon the text, Gen. ch. iv. v. 7. The reader will do well to refer to them.³⁰ Another text often appealed to in this matter by theologians, is that of the apostle, “ the flesh lusteth against the spirit.”

³⁰ *Lib. 15. cap. viij.*

Waldensis puts the argument in a way which I cannot but think very much to the purpose. “In hac parte carnali habitat peccatum, secundum apostolum, illud scilicet quod ibi relictum est ex traduce, vel ex consuetudine delinquendi. Habitat autem ibi quasi ad fores animæ: quod si mens intro suscepit per consensum, jam concupiscentia ipsa generavit peccatum, et peccatum mortem: efficiturque mortale peccatum, quod in foribus habitans veniale fuisset. Unde *Ambrosius*. ‘In carne [inquit] habitat peccatum quasi ad januas animæ, ut non illam permittat ire quo vult. In anima autem si habitaret, nunquam se cognosceret homo. Nunc autem cognoscit se, et condelectatur legi Dei.’ Hoc ergo genus est peccati, quod homo trahit invitus: sed sic attractum observat, et per conversionem sui ad se per Dei gratiam perimit. Unde ex sui conditione efficitur veniale; quia adhuc per consensum mentis non placuit, ut esset mortale.”³¹

³¹ Doctrinale. *Opera. tom. 2.* p. 892. Allusion is made in the above passage to the doctrine regarding the mode whereby the sin of Adam was transmitted to his descendants. The schoolmen generally rejected the opinion, that souls were transmitted through generation by the parents to their children, *traducianismus*; and, the majority at least, held that souls are created continually and ever by God, *creationismus*. No one who has ever meditated on this most deep mystery of original

sin,—its cause, its transmission, its effects, its guilt, its consequences,—will dare to think lightly of the disputes which at various times have occupied men’s minds about it. Some particulars involved in it are far more practical than others: none, however, are to be deemed trifling, and of little weight: and all are, to us, an unfathomable mystery.

The extract from S. Ambrose by Waldensis, is from a book now commonly acknowledged not to be by that father: viz. the com-

The reader will already have learnt from the preceding dissertation that distinct confession of venial sins was never held to be necessary in order to their remission, (whether by sacerdotal absolution, or by any other way) according to the teaching of the Church. Hence there is no force in the objection which has been suggested against the effect of the absolution in the liturgy, as interpreted above: I mean, this objection: "If our Church does not hold auricular confession to be necessary, then, how does the absolution in the communion Service convey actual remission of [venial] sins? or how should it be thought that our Church *intended* it should, since she does not require" distinct confession before this absolution, "which is deemed to be an essential condition" of the grace of absolution? ³²

It would be very easy to heap up authorities from writers of the church of England respecting the various modes by which pardon of venial sin is obtained, through the infinite mercies of the Almighty. But these are not now required. Yet it is well to hear S. Augustine upon the same point. He thus speaks first of deadly sins in his Enchiridion, *De fide, spe, et caritate*. "Sane cavendum est, ne quisquam existimet infanda illa crima, qualia qui agunt, regnum Dei

mentary on the Epistles of S. Paul. Still a very early work, and of considerable authority.

"Igitur est peccatum," says Waldensis in the next chapter, "sine quo nec a justis viris hic

vivitur: sed quia statim venia deletur, dicitur *veniale*, puta oratione devota sui." *Ibid.* p. 894.

³² Letter, etc. by the Rev. F. T. Hill, p. 4.

non possidebunt, quotidie perpetranda, et eleemosynis quotidie redimenda. In melius quippe est vita mutanda. . . . De quotidianis autem brevibus levibusque peccatis, sine quibus hæc vita non ducitur, quotidiana fidelium oratio satisfacit. Eorum est enim dicere, *Pater noster qui es in cælis*, qui jam Patri tali regenerati sunt ex aqua et Spiritu. Delet omnino hæc oratio minima et quotidiana peccata.”³³ But the works of S. Augustine abound with references to venial or daily sins. Take one more extract, from one of the homilies on repentance. Having mentioned many sins which, daily, Christian men cannot altogether avoid, he continues: “Quam multa sunt alia peccata, sive in loquendo de rebus et negotiis alienis, quæ non ad te pertinent, sive in vanis cachinnationibus, cum scriptum sit, *Stultus in risu exaltat vocem suam, sapiens autem vix tacite ridebit*: sive in ipsis escis, quæ ad necessitatem sustentandæ hujus vitæ præparantur, avidior atque immoderatior appetitus; sive in vendendis et emendis rebus caritatis et vilitatis vota perversa. Piget cuncta colligere, quæ quisque in se ipso certius comprehendit atque reprehendit, si divinarum scripturarum speculum non negligenter attendat. Quæ quemvis singula non lethali vulnere ferire sentiantur, sicuti homicidium et adulterium, vel cætera hujusmodi, tamen omnia simul congregata velut scabies, quò plura sunt necant, . . . nisi medicamento quotidianæ pœnitentiæ desiccentur.”³⁴

³³ Cap. lxx. Opera. tom. 6. p. 223.³⁴ Serm. ccclj. tom. 5. p. 1355.

I would conclude these remarks with one or two quotations from divines of our Church in the seventeenth century. First, Field. Having confuted a statement of cardinal Bellarmin, he continues : “Wee say therefore that some sinnes are mortall and some veniall, not because some deserve eternity of punishment, and others do not ; . . . but because some sins, either in respect of the matter wherein men do offend, or *ex imperfectione actus*, in that they are not committed with full consent, exclude not grace, the roote of remission, and pardon, out of the soule of him that committeth them : whereas other, either in respect of the matter wherein they are conversant, or the full consent wherewith they are committed, cannot stand with grace. So that no sin is venial in its own nature, without respect had to the state of grace.”³⁵ I should hesitate, let me observe, in extending so widely as Dr. Field the limits within which venial sin would range ; and I altogether dissent from the line of argument upon which (as the reader by referring to his work will see) his conclusions are founded. But he is quoted here simply to establish the distinction always recognized between deadly and venial sins.

Bishop Overal, in a passage already quoted above, p. 13, in the former part of this book : “ Venial sins, that separate not from the grace of God, need not so much to trouble a man’s conscience. If he have committed any mortal sin, then we require, *etc.*”

³⁵ Of the Church, *Book. 3. app. p. 279.*

Again, Thorndike ; in his enquiry into the distinction between sins. “ It is manifest, that they who undertake to be Christians come into the world with concupiscence ; and therefore cannot undertake never to sinne : though they may undertake to persecute and crucify their owne inclination to sinne, and to deny themselves things otherwise lawfull, when they find themselves subject, thereby to be seduced to sinne. . . . Here is then the ground, why those thinges which are done against the rule which the gospel proposeth, out of invincible ignorance, or out of meer surprizes of concupiscence, cannot by the gospell, be imputed to Christians, striving toward that perfection which Christianity importeth And though these are sinnes against the originall law of paradise, and the directive part of Christ’s law, which revives it ; yet they are not sinnes against the covenant of grace, contracted upon supposition of originall sinne ; nor against the vindicative part of Christ’s law, according to which He will judge Christians.”³⁶

Once more ; bishop Jeremy Taylor. I pass by, most reluctantly, with a mere reference to them, his chapters upon *The difference of sins and their remedies*, in his *Doctrine and Practice of repentance*. And from another work, more famous, take the following : “ The distinction of mortal and venial sins as it is taught in the church of Rome, is a great cause of wickedness and careless conversation. For although

³⁶ Epilogue. *Book. 2. p. 286.*

we do, with all the ancient doctors, admit of the distinction of sins mortal and venial; yet we also teach, that in their own nature, and in the rigour of the Divine justice, every sin is damnable and deserves God's anger: yet, by the Divine mercy and compassion, the smaller sins which come by surprize, or by invincible ignorance, or inadvertency, or unavoidable infirmity, shall not be imputed to those who love God, and delight not in the smallest sin, but use caution and prayers, watchfulness and remedies, against them.³⁷

Nor upon a point so grave as that which has been now before us, and regarding which so many strange assertions have been put forth by late writers of the church of Rome, do I hesitate to sum up all that I have now said, in the words also of bishop Taylor. Whilst we must not allow with careless authors of our own day that no distinction exists, the present is not a time when we may hastily seem to give any countenance whatever to popular and loose notions of venial sin; as if there is, which indeed there is not, any one sin on earth which a Christian may deliberately and without guilt give way to. So let me heartily say with Jeremy Taylor; “ Because the doctors differ so infinitely and irreconcilably, in saying what is and what is not venial; whoever shall trust to their doctrine, saying, [*beforehand*] that such a sin is venial; and to their doctrine, that says, it does not exclude

³⁷ Dissuasive from popery. Works. vol. 10. p. 209.

from God's favour, may, by these two propositions, be damned before he is aware.”³⁸

IV. It may not be out of place here for me to notice very briefly the “ Letter” to which reference has twice been made, and of which I have spoken also in my preface to this Enquiry. I say, very briefly; not from any want of courtesy towards the writer, but because his objections have been already considered: and, indeed, I again would refer to them particularly now, both because it may not seem that they have not received due attention, and because I may make what return I may, in acknowledgment of the kind tone and Christian spirit in which they have been brought before me.

It is said in that *Letter*; “ The church of Rome has decreed that it is necessary, by the Divine law, to confess all and single mortal sins, which can, by diligent premeditation, be remembered; whereas the most that our Church has conceived it expedient to do, is to order her ministers to *advise* the sick person to a special confession, if he feel his conscience troubled by any weighty matter. The church of Rome *requires* this confession as *necessary*—our Church only recommends it as *expedient*. The church of Rome *demands* confession of *all sins whatsoever*—our church only *advises* it in regard to those sins which press heavy on the conscience and disturb the mind; and only enjoins absolution to the sick man in case he

³⁸ *Ibid. p. 212.*

earnestly desires it.”³⁹ May it not be said that there is here a confusion, not uncommonly to be met with, (as I have before observed,) between the two questions of the necessity simply of oral confession, and the necessity of oral confession in order to sacerdotal absolution? Upon this matter I have explained myself over and over again. But if the argument means that the church of England does not insist upon confession of all remembered sins, before sacerdotal absolution, then it must be rejected as incorrect: because not only her constant doctrine is plainly opposed to such an assertion, but also the rubric distinctly requires, *if the sick person feel his conscience troubled with any weighty matter, a special confession,—not of that weighty matter alone, but,—of his sins.*

I readily own, if this one word had been in the singular instead of the plural, that an objection might possibly have lain against my interpretation of the forms of absolution in our Common-prayer book. To what extent that objection would have reached, and whether it would have so altered the whole doctrine of the church of England regarding absolution, as to have placed her with respect to one essential particular, in avowed opposition to the judgement not only of herself for nearly 2000 years but of the catholic Church also, I shall not trouble to enquire. The fact remains: *confession of his sins.* From 1549, when no doubt of the doctrine of our Church had been

³⁹ “Letter” by Rev. F. T. Hill. *p. 5.*

stirred in this matter, down to 1662, the rubric ordered, in equivalent although more general terms, *a special confession*: at the last review, the addition was made, *of his sins*.

The more I consider this circumstance, with the more heartfelt thankfulness and confidence do I look upon it, as a token among many, hardly to be unseen, of the care and guiding with which the Almighty Head of the universal Church ceaselessly has guarded, to His own wise ends and purposes, this our church of England. These considerations, and such as these, bring their especial comfort. Some men perhaps may be indifferent about them. For myself, at one time in one thing and at another in another, light and trivial as alone or singly they may or might have been, together in their accumulation they supply—not arguments merely, for that in comparison would be a poor result, but—patience in days of dispute and difficulty, in days of trial and obloquy and reproach; motives, again, to exertion and untiring labour in our Church's cause; constant confirmation of the sacred truths which I believe she holds; and, above all, with God's most gracious help, an undoubting determination to endeavour by all means and in every possible way, under her own holy shadow and protection, still and for ever to defend her against avowed enemies from without, and against mistaken friends within.

Again, Mr. Hill quotes Hooker, in his sixth book. The passage as given in the *Letter*, is: “The act of sin God alone remitteth as for the ministerial

sentence of private absolution, it can be no more than a *declaration* of what God hath done The priest doth never in absolution, no, not so much as by way of service and ministry, really either forgive the act, or remove the punishment of sin ; but if the party penitent come contrite, he hath by their own grant, absolution before absolution.” The writer of the *Letter* concludes that there will be objection made to this sixth book being certainly a genuine part of the great work of Richard Hooker : I do not intend to dispute it controversially, but I have no hesitation in saying, that, as we now possess it, I for one do doubt about it. This very extract itself is not quite like the first and the fifth books of the Ecclesiastical Polity. If the words “not so much as by way of service and ministry” are really to be understood in their theological sense, they are not according to the usual well weighed language, nor in the spirit, of the author so long called amongst us “judicious.” They prove too much. But if they are to be taken in a looser sense, (of which we have no example in the preceding books,) then there is not in the extract anything which militates against the doctrine of absolution advocated by many of the schoolmen, against whom this part of the so-called seventh book was written. And here let me observe that whatever part, under the mysterious plan of God’s dealings with mankind in and by His Church, the ministers of that Church fulfil and complete in the administration of the sacrament of absolution, it is the same and no more than they fulfil in the administra-

tion of the sacrament of holy baptism. In the one case, as it is said that they forgive all sins committed before baptism; so, exactly, and in no other way whilst in the same way, it is said that in absolution they forgive all sins after baptism. The ministers of the Most High God are the ministers of His sacraments: in which sacraments “God ordinarily worketh, and whereby He participateth unto us His special gifts and graces in this life.”

But, as I have repeated very often, the question is not what any one divine, however great, may have declared to be his individual opinion, but what the judgement is of the Church of England. To her authority alone will I defer; and by her voice alone this doctrine of absolution, and every other doctrine, is to be decided.

Ecce dabit voci suae, vocem virtutis.

Date gloriam Deo super Israel: magnificencia ejus, et virtus ejus in nubibus.

Mirabilis Deus in sanctis suis; Deus Israel: ipse dabit virtutem et fortitudinem plebi suae, benedictus Deus.

Appendix.

Extract from a Sermon on “The Outward Means of Grace,” preached at the Visitation of the Lord Bishop of Exeter, at Totnes, Aug. 11th, 1848.

N the Book of Common-prayer, we find three forms, called, of absolution. The first is at the beginning of morning and evening prayer: and, as you are well aware, was added with the sentences to the second Book of King Edward in 1552. There is propriety in such a commencement. The sentences, the exhortation, the unanimous voice of confession by those who may happen to have already assembled, the declaration of God's infinite mercy,—all is appropriate and good: more than appropriate, I do not esteem it: nor do I see any ground for concluding that there is any thing in it sacramental. The confession is a prayer: the absolution is declaratory; telling of the power which God has given to His ministers, the freeness of pardon to the true penitent, and the necessity of calling upon Him. I am unable also to perceive any force in the use of the term “pronounce,” and in the words “the priest alone.” In practice it is true that deacons officiating omit this declaration; and rightly so: the question whether they ought not also, as rightly, to omit other parts of the offices where “the priest” is especially mentioned, immediately occurs: as they do not so strictly interpret the rubric in one place, why should they in another? I am very far from asserting that it is the function of a deacon to “pronounce” this absolution, but I do mean that we cannot argue for any sacerdotal character to be especially attributed to it, solely on account of common practice, and the wording of the rubric.

We come now to the absolution which is in the Liturgy.

This certainly has an effect: and in order to learn what effect, we must remember that for a thousand years in our Church the Service of the holy communion has never been celebrated without this or a similar form of confession and absolution, immediately preceding consecration and reception. Continued therefore as it has thus been, through all the various revisions of our Service-books, we must regard it as meaning now what it always meant, and still working the same effects. We have no right to put upon it any new interpretation: if it was not in old time merely declaratory, so, neither, is it not now: if it was not *then* an exercise in its full extent of the priestly power of absolution, reaching over all sins, great or small, venial or mortal, so is it not now. And this ancient form of absolution, at such a time, was never held by the church of England to fall within either the one of these classes, or the other: the first would sink it too low, the last exalt it far too high. Its intention was this. You know that before the year 1549 the constant rule for many centuries had been, that no one, having sin upon his conscience, should receive the holy communion, except he had first orally confessed, and obtained absolution. This duty however, it could not but often be, must have preceded, by a longer or shorter time, actual communion. Yet so great a service was not to be approached, except in as pure and purified a state as might be. And all men owned that even for a few hours it was hardly possible to be without sin. Without mortal, wilful sin, by God's grace and earnest faith, it might be: but still there would be perhaps an inadvertance, perhaps a careless thought, perhaps a hasty word, which still would be sin, though checked. It was to meet these cases, venial sins, that this form was always part of the office of the Eucharist: and it was intended to convey remission of those sins, and of those sins only.

Such is still the force and value of this form. Whether, in accordance with the permission now granted by the church of England, (and of which I have already spoken,) we have, in secret, relying on our own judgment, carefully searched our consciences, and spread out our grievous sins in all their naked

ness before the Almighty Throne, and humbly and with bitter sorrow asked for pardon; whether, being doubtful and unquiet, we have gone, as we are bid to do, to the priest, and opened our grief, and at his hands received the benefit of absolution in its higher sense and meaning;—whatever may have been our determination, still the succeeding absolution, in the immediate presence of God, before His altar, remits, as in old time, the lighter venial sins, and those sins only.

We come to the third form, viz. that in the Office of Visitation of the sick. Now, at first sight, there is a most obvious and special distinction between this and the previous forms, which must often have occurred to every one of us: a distinction which, whilst it holds with regard to the form in the communion Service, is so clear with regard to the first form, namely, that prefixed to morning and evening prayer, that it seems to me, in itself and alone, to be decisive against including the three forms under one class.

In the first form, we find a declaration of the infinite mercy of God towards truly repentant sinners, and of authority given to his ministers, followed by a conclusion from those premises; “Wherefore,” &c. and an exhortation so to repent and, if it may be, be forgiven. In the Communion it is said, in a very remarkable mode of expression, half-precatory, half declaratory; “Almighty God—have mercy upon you; pardon and deliver you; &c.—” But, how different is the form which we are now considering; how exactly accordant with the examples in like cases, of centuries on centuries, up to the apostolic age, and therefore to be interpreted according to the same theology.

For let me repeat and urge upon you, reverend brethren, the soundest principle of interpretation which we can use, in enquiring into the true meaning of the various services in our Common-prayer-book; that whatsoever we there find handed down from the earlier rituals of the church of England, and not limited in its meaning by any subsequent canon or article must be understood to signify fully and entirely, all that it signified before the revision of the ritual. Few, I suppose,

would argue that we are, each of us, at liberty to put the crude and often ignorant conclusions of our private judgment upon the pregnant sentences and words of our Common-prayer-book.

Recollect then the form appointed in the Office for the Sick : “Our Lord Jesus Christ—hath left power to His Church,—and by His authority committed to me, I absolve thee from all thy sins, In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” Are these words meaningless? Are they terms expressive of *hope* that the Lord God Almighty will have mercy upon a truly repentant sinner? Is language so awful, as this is, called for, for such a simple end as that? “*I absolve thee from all thy sins!*”—We, brethren, did not arrogate and usurp power to ourselves; we did not draw up the form by which it is to be exercised; but we are priests in the Church of God, and have both received power and are bound to use it. Using it, what are the effects that follow? Briefly; —and without enquiring into what may also be the amount of spiritual grace given, for the further purpose of strengthening against temptation, and of confirming in all good resolutions, and of increasing faith;—briefly, I say, we must hold them to be these: that if the penitent shall have made a special confession of his sins, if, also, he humbly and heartily desire absolution, if he truly repent, and sincerely believe, then that the priest, ministerially, by the authority and power committed to him at his ordination, does, using this form, actually and entirely absolve him from the guilt of those sins, and in consequence restore him by the sacrament of absolution to the state of justification, to the state of favour and of grace from which he had fallen.

I cannot honestly conceive that such plain words are not so plainly to be understood; nor this solely upon that account, but for other reasons:—because I have not discovered any trace of variation in the formal teaching of the church of England on this matter;—because I am confident that she has always attached one constant meaning to the form which we have been considering;—because I think that meaning to be

in strict accordance with the faith of the Holy Catholic Church, and with the written Word;—because I cannot see in the doctrine of *restoring* a lapsed Christian to his state of justification by absolution, a greater difficulty than in the truth that he is *admitted into* that state, originally, by baptism.



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